

## **BOARD OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

March 11, 2021

Virtual and Call-in Meeting

### **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Mr. Willie C. Bolton  
Chief Bruce Carlisle  
Chief Stacey Cotton  
Lt. Nicholas D. Ellis  
Mr. Richard Hyde  
Chief Leonard "Dee" Meadows  
Commissioner Michael Nail  
Mr. Rossie Ross  
Mr. Charles D. Sikes  
Sheriff Joey Terrell  
Chief Craig Tully  
Commissioner Timothy C. Ward  
Mr. Ellison G. Wood

### **BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Mr. George Hartwig  
Sheriff Dane Kirby

### **OTHERS:**

Ms. Tina Piper, Attorney General's Office  
Mrs. Jennifer Pendarvis, Board Liaison  
Lt. Colonel Billy Hitchens, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Lt. Colonel Stephanie Stallings, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Major Josh Lamb, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Major Kendrick Lowe, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Major Jeremy Vickery, Department of Public Safety/MCCD  
Major Billy Boulware, Department of Public Safety/MCCD  
Lt. Mark Riley, Department of Public Safety  
Mrs. Lorrie Smith, Department of Public Safety  
Ms. Kaycee Larson, Department of Public Safety  
Director Vic Reynolds, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Mr. John Melvin, Assistant Director, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Ms. Rhonda Westbrook, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Director Chris Wigginton Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Ms. Cindy Jones, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Ms. Danielle Robbins, Attorney General's Office  
Mrs. Janice Brown, Georgia Coroners Training Council Member  
Mr. Mark Savage, Georgia Coroners Training Council Member  
Mr. Richard Stanley, Georgia Coroners Training Council Member  
Mr. Bill Akins  
Ms. Cheryl Buie

Vice-Chairman Ellis Wood called the March 11, 2021 Board of Public Safety meeting to order.

Mr. Bill Akins gave the Invocation and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice-Chairman Wood recognized Mr. Richard Stanley as being present in the room.

Mrs. Janice Brown, Mr. Mark Savage, and Mr. Richard Stanley were sworn-in by Vice-Chairman Wood as new members of the Georgia Coroners Training Council.

Vice-Chairman Wood called for approval of the February 11, 2021 BPS minutes. Chief Craig Tully made the motion to approve the February 11, 2021 minutes. This was seconded by Mr. Willie Bolton and voted approved by the Board members.

### **DIRECTOR REPORTS**

Deputy Commissioner Billy Hitchens, Georgia Department of Public Safety, reported Colonel Wright's eye surgery went well this morning and he is on his way home, with a five-day recovery period.

Deputy Commissioner Hitchens updated the Board on the 110<sup>th</sup> Trooper School by noting the class is currently at 38 cadets.

Regarding the COVID situation with DPS employees, Deputy Commissioner Hitchens noted there have been 3,338 Executive Order calls, which are continuing daily, and DPS currently has 8 employees confirmed positive with the Coronavirus and to-date, there have been 202 DPS employees confirmed with the virus and returned to work. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens shared DPS has assisted with 41 COVID vaccine transports for the month of February and has a running total of 88. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens stated patrol vehicles and aircraft are being utilized to transport the vaccines across the state. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens further stated DPS, GBI, and DNR are providing off-duty security at the Mass Vaccination Sites on a 24-hour basis.

Deputy Commissioner Hitchens reported with the legislature still in session, there continues to be planned and impromptu protests at the Capitol. DPS Command has been monitoring intel from the FBI, GISAC, and Atlanta Police Department and is continually updating the Department's planning and response. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens thanked those partners for sharing information so DPS can properly respond and handle any situations that arise. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens added the Department has plans that includes state partners and the National Guard to respond if things do get out of hand, and they have been very helpful throughout this time of civil unrest and the Department could not do it without them. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens stated the Department continues to support lawful and peaceful assembly of citizens to express their First Amendment Rights, but the Department will continue to do its job by not allowing lawlessness to occur at the State Capitol.

Deputy Commissioner Hitchens shared the Department's Motor Carrier Compliance Division partnered with GSP Troopers and local agencies at regional inspection stations throughout the state to look for impaired Commercial Motor Vehicle drivers. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens reported personnel conducted 3 details in Ringgold, Forsyth, and Atlanta, which consisted of one day of

refresher training for impaired drivers with a check that followed. The check lasted for 4 hours, where all CMVs entering the checkpoint were screened. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens reported during those checks, there were 6 vehicles and 11 drivers placed out of service, 28 vehicle violations, 7 impaired drivers, 1 missing juvenile, and 9 distracted drivers.

Deputy Commissioner Hitchens announced 2 Troopers have recently been re-hired by the Department from the 106<sup>th</sup> Trooper School, stating the Department is still in litigation with the remainder of the class; therefore, nothing further can be discussed, but he is very glad the 2 have been re-hired.

Vice-Chairman Wood asked for questions from the room for Deputy Commissioner Hitchens. Mr. Charles Sikes asked if there has been a notice of any recruitment changes since the change of the tattoo and training procedures approved at the last meeting, to which Deputy Commissioner Hitchens responded the Department saw an uptick right after the announcement but it has now leveled off. Deputy Commissioner Hitchens stated he is hearing certified officers are very interested in the 112<sup>th</sup> Accelerated Trooper School.

Mr. Richard Hyde asked Deputy Commissioner Hitchens, in reference to Page 3 on the Board Report, when was the last time the Department had less than 767 Troopers, to which Deputy Commissioner Hitchens responded without research he couldn't say for certain, but he does recall around 2004, the Department dipped into the high 600 number of Troopers. Mr. Hyde mentioned the Dispatcher drop in numbers as well, to which Deputy Commissioner Hitchens stated there is a high turnover in sworn personnel and Dispatchers right now, about a 17% turnover rate.

Director Vic Reynolds, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, announced the Agency is starting a new Agent School in April and they are looking forward to getting more "boots on the ground". Director Reynolds thanked Director Wigginton, GPSTC, for allowing the Agency to have its promotions and awards ceremony at their facility last week.

Director Reynolds also reported on having personnel providing security at the Mass Vaccination Sites, indicating agents are working with Troopers, Officers, GEMA, and local staff to secure those Sites.

Director Reynolds announced the Crime Lab backlog numbers are nearly cut in half of what he inherited when he took the Director position with the Bureau.

Regarding the legislative session, Directory Reynolds reported the legislators have been gracious to the Agency and has allowed some budget changes for the recruitment and retention of Medical Examiners to get their staffing numbers up. Director Reynolds explained there are about 1100-1200 Forensic Pathologist jobs in the United States and there are only about 550 Forensic Pathologists. Director Reynolds further explained the Agency has lost three Medical Examiners recently and this graciousness of the legislators will be a tremendous help. Director Reynolds reported as soon as they posted the job with the new pay, more applications were received and the Agency was able to hire a new doctor, who will begin with the Agency in August, and there are interviews set up for other doctors.

Director Reynolds stated 12 new scientists will be hired in late April / early May and 9 of those will be assigned to DNA testing in an effort to get cases caught up. Director Reynolds noted the Agency is outsourcing some of their drug cases, particularly single source drug cases, and this will allow the backlog to get down.

Vice-Chairman Wood asked for questions from the room for Director Reynolds. Mr. Charles Sikes asked Director Reynolds how their applicant pool looked for the Special Agent position. Director Reynolds reported they started out with (approximately) 400 applicants, which was narrowed down to polygraphing 140-150, which will be narrowed down 80-90 for Command Staff interviews. Director Reynolds further stated after Command Staff interviews, the number will be narrowed down to 22 or 23 for the School.

Mr. Richard Hyde asked Director Reynolds about the "Rap Back" project referenced in the Board Report and if judges can be included. Director Reynolds responded he would find out and let him know. Director Reynolds later advised Mr. Hyde the program is for legislatively approved agencies; therefore, judges are not included.

Director Chris Wigginton, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, reported the Center is still averaging around 3200 students, with 373 courses being taught in January. Director Wigginton explained during the month of January, the numbers are slightly down but for the year, GPSTC is on pace to exceed what has been done in the previous years.

Director Wigginton announced the Center is getting ready to start the second basic training academy for the year in April and they have just started the second phase of the newly administered Physical Agility Training (PAT) course throughout the state. In reference to this course, Director Wigginton stated it currently has a 90% pass rate and the 10% who failed will get a second attempt, which will up the pass rate. Director Wigginton added the last class ended up with a 93% pass rate.

Director Wigginton informed the Board the Center is working with POST on three different projects. Director Wigginton stated one is the instructor program. Director Wigginton explained the instructor program currently in Georgia is a three-week course where the student is on campus for a week then take a week off to research and develop a lesson plan, then comes back the third week to do a presentation. Director Wigginton noted the Training Center has discovered out of about 10,000 instructors in the state, only about 3,000 of those actively instruct, so there are a lot of instructors who do not go out and instruct, they just want to teach canned material, for example just go back to their agency and instruct in-service training and never develop a lesson plan. Director Wigginton stated the Center wants to re-vamp the instructor program and make it a five-tiered process.

Director Wigginton explained level one will be weeklong and will be an instructor who can teach in basic training with support of a specialized instructor, but just teaching canned, in-service material such as legal updates. Director Wigginton continued to explain level two will be the course currently in place, which will be the three-week course with a developed curriculum. Director Wigginton concluded level three will stay exactly like it is, which is where instructors will come back and get

specialized certifications, such as firearms, driving, defensive tactics, first responders, etc. Director Wigginton noted currently, the next two levels (levels four and five) exist and are considered senior and master instructors. Director Wigginton cited under today's standards, to get the senior and master instructor, you must come back and help during an instructor class, explaining it was implemented and designed to help the Training Center teach instructor courses, but is no longer needed and is considered a waste of time for the individual and the Academy. Director Wigginton stated the Center wants to put a little recognition behind an instructor identifying as a senior instructor and master instructor; therefore, these levels will have more developmental instructor categories and get into testing procedures and learning how to write test questions for POST. Director Wigginton reported these changes will be presented at an upcoming meeting.

Director Wigginton shared the next project the Training Center is working on with POST is regarding the intermediate and advanced certificates police officers obtain. Director Wigginton explained a lot of those certificates are tied to promotions or advancements, or some agencies just require officers to get it. Director Wigginton noted if you go back and do a little historical work on the intermediate and advanced certifications, when it was developed, it was developed to cover courses not taught in basic academy; however, there is not a lot that is not covered in basic academy, which causes some courses to be repetitive. Director Wigginton explained when people promote and go to certain units, they are not allowed to do their career advancement in the assignment they are in. Director Wigginton stated the advanced course will be a base line on the core intermediate classes every officer in the state, no matter who they work for, gets. Director Wigginton further explained currently, when you get to the advanced classes, if an individual is a detective, for example and took a homicide investigation class, the class would not count toward their advanced certification, but in the new proposal, it would; or if they are an accident reconstructionist, they attend accident classes, and it would count toward their advanced certification. Director Wigginton stated this is allowing the certifications to be more of a career development in the field they are in.

Director Wigginton reported the last project is in reference to School Resource Officers (SRO) and this proposal was developed with the assistance of Sheriff Terrell and his staff. Director Wigginton noted currently there are about 2800 schools in the state and a vast majority have an SRO, but the majority of them are not trained to be an SRO, they are put there by an agency because the need is there, and they are put there without any proper training. Director Wigginton advised they are asking POST to make the School Resource Officer class a certification and tier the certification so the officer can get continuing education credit and stay in that environment. Director Wigginton stated the Center has been working with the Department of Education and private organizations to help develop this curriculum and POST is supportive to help make this a certification.

In summary, Director Wigginton noted these are three of the highlighted areas the Training Center has been working on for quite some time to request POST Council support to get these recommendations approved and part of the criteria in Georgia.

Vice-Chairman Wood asked for questions from the room for Director Wigginton. Lieutenant Nick Ellis commended Director Wigginton for proposing these changes, noting they will certainly help

police officers and inspire those who have retired to become active again. Vice-Chairman Wood thanked Director Wigginton and Sheriff Terrell for their work on the SRO program. Mr. Charles Sikes asked Director Wigginton what the housing capacity at GPSTC is, to which Director Wigginton advised is 535 beds. In response to Mr. Sikes asking if the pandemic has changed the number, Director Wigginton replied during the pandemic in its heightened state it was reduced to single occupancy rooms but now they have returned to some double occupancy.

Director Wigginton requested the Board to approve an increase in cafeteria prices. Director Wigginton explained the cafeteria is 100% revenue funded. Director Wigginton stated several years ago, maybe during 2006 when the recession hit, then GPSTC Director Mann was asked to do some reductions and some of what he gave up was the cafeteria, where they had to eliminate free meals and were still able to provide workers in the cafeteria their salaries. Director Wigginton noted the cafeteria is not only a revenue funded source to replenish goods it also supports the staff who works in the cafeteria. Director Wigginton stated during the current pandemic, the Center was shut down for about a month and a half and afterwards the Center was only running at about 20-30% occupancy and now it is running about 80-85%. Director Wigginton explained this resulted in the staff having to look at numbers and work with distributors and vendors, and they have noticed the revenue string there at one time with 1000-1500 students on campus a day is not there when having 200-300. Director Wigginton advised the staff made some adjustments and noticed since he has been on staff, the Training Center has never asked for an increase in cost of meals. Director Wigginton noted meals currently range from \$3.50-\$5.00 and in talking with distributors, they suggest if you are in the food industry, you go up about 2% a year just to cover cost of goods and inflation and the Center has not had any increase. Director Wigginton stated if changes are not made, the Center would be in a deficit. Director Wigginton explained the Training Center is not in the business of making money, but it does not want to lose money or lay anyone off if it can be prevented, and the only way to do this is to adjust the prices in the cafeteria. Director Wigginton informed the Board they are selling some items cheaper than what is paid. Therefore, Director Wigginton asked for an average increase of 20%, giving the example of a meal costing \$3.50 would result in a \$.70 increase; one costing \$4.00 would be an \$.80 increase.

Vice-Chairman Wood asked for questions from the room in reference to the price increase proposal at the GPSTC cafeteria. Mr. Charles Sikes asked Director Wigginton to keep the Board updated on the situation. Mr. Willie Bolton asked Director Wigginton if the Training Center staff conducted a food index analysis on the food yet, citing himself being in the business as a prison warden and understanding the increases. Mr. Bolton stated he agrees the increase is merited and the food cost is something to stay on top of. Director Wigginton responded with an example during the Super Bowl, the cost of chicken wings went up almost 60% through the vendor and those items were already pre-ordered, so the Training Center had to "eat" the cost.

The motion to approve an increase of up to 20% to defray the cost of the use of the training facility and its staff at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center cafeteria was made by Lt. Nick Ellis, which was seconded by Charles Sikes and voted approved by the Board members.

### **DONATIONS**

Ms. Cindy Jones, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, requested approval of the following donations:

Five Hundred Dollars Cash	\$500.00	Georgia Arson Control
Sixteen (16) Molle Double Belt Rigs	\$2,409.52	Blue Alpha Company
One (1) 2004 Ford Crown Victoria	\$990.00	Prosecuting Attorneys' Council of Georgia

The motion to accept these donations was made by Sheriff Joey Terrell, which was seconded by Chief Craig Tully and voted approved by the Board members.

Director Reynolds, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, presented a resolution to grant a 0.12-acre permanent easement, located at the Georgia Bureau of Investigation's Western Crime Laboratory, for use and maintenance by the Columbus Consolidated Government, Columbus, GA allowing maintenance of the main sewer line to be passed to the Columbus Consolidated Government. Maintenance of the laboratory's connecting sewer line shall remain with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

The motion to accept this Resolution was made by Mr. Charles Sikes, which was seconded by Sheriff Joey Terrell and voted approved by the Board members. Mr. Richard Hyde abstained from the vote.

Vice-Chairman Wood asked Department of Community Supervision Commissioner Michael Nail if he had any comments to share on behalf of the Department of Community Supervision. Commissioner Nail reported courts have been given the green light to try cases, so they are waiting to see the new cases coming their way. Commissioner Nail commented, based on discussions with colleagues across the nation, sometimes we can take for granted what good collaboration and cooperation we have amongst our State Law Enforcement and wants to particularly commend the State Patrol, GBI, and Public Safety Training Center. Commissioner Nail noted the agencies have a spirit of teamwork and cooperation and he just wanted to take the opportunity to say how proud he is of the service we provide, and we are fortunate in the state of Georgia, stating it is not like this in all states and it is something we should never take for granted.

Vice-Chairman Wood asked Department of Corrections Commissioner Ward if he had any comments to share on behalf of the Department of Corrections. Commissioner Ward reported the Department of Corrections has about 204 active COVID cases state-wide among about 47,000 inmate population, which is good. Commissioner Ward noted when the Governor extended the list of those who are eligible for vaccines, we will be able to vaccinate another 17,000 offenders. Commissioner Ward shared the DOC has been averaging an 84% participation rate with the vaccinations.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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Craig Tully  
Secretary