

**BOARD OF PUBLIC SAFETY**  
March 14, 2025  
Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Forsyth, Georgia

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Mr. Willie Bolton  
Mr. Roy H. Fickling  
Mr. Richard Hyde  
Sheriff E. Neal Jump  
Sheriff Jimmy McDuffie  
Chief Janet L. Moon  
Commissioner Michael Nail  
Mr. Billy New  
Commissioner Tyrone Oliver  
Mr. Charles D. Sikes  
Ms. Susan K. Treadaway  
Chief Craig Tully  
Mr. Ellison G. Wood

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Mr. Stacey Cotton  
Chief Leonard "Dee" Meadows

**OTHERS:**

Ms. Deborah Gore, Attorney General's Office  
Mrs. Jennifer Pendarvis, Board Liaison  
Commissioner Billy Hitchens, Department of Public Safety  
Lt. Colonel Kendrick Lowe, Department of Public Safety  
Lt. Colonel Robert Balkcom, Department of Public Safety  
Major Walt Christian, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Major Chris Rodewolt, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Major Doug Wilson, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Major David Bryant, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Major Gary Langford, Department of Public Safety/Capitol Police  
Major Andrew Montgomery, Department of Public Safety/MCCD  
Captain Brandon Dawson, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Captain Jonathan Huff, Department of Public Safety/MCCD  
SFC Billy Schwab, Department of Public Safety/GSP  
Director Chris Hosey, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Assistant Director Scott Dutton, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Division Director Rhonda Westbrook, Georgia Bureau of Investigation/GCIC  
Director Chris Wigginton, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Deputy Director Cheryl Greathouse, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Division Director Ike McConnell, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Division Director Ara Baronian, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Division Director Ray Ham, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Division Director Angela Batey, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Mrs. Lorri Smith, Georgia Department of Public Safety

Ms. Cathy Perry, Georgia Department of Public Safety  
Ms. Cindy Jones, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Ms. April Smith, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Mr. Jason McDaniel, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Ms. Sharla Shockley, Georgia Public Safety Training Center

Vice-Chairman Ellis Wood called the March 14, 2025 Board of Public Safety meeting to order.

Mr. Ike McConnell, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, gave the Invocation and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice-Chairman Wood called for approval of the February 13, 2025 BPS minutes. Mr. Willie Bolton made the motion to approve the February 13, 2025 minutes. This was seconded by Mr. Roy Fickling and voted approved by the Board members.

### **DIRECTOR REPORTS**

Commissioner Billy Hitchens, Georgia Department of Public Safety, announced with the appointment of Lt. Colonel Lamb to GEMA and the retirement of Major Harrelson, DPS has made several new appointments to the Command Staff. Commissioner Hitchens introduced Lt. Colonel Robert Balkcom to replace Lt. Colonel Lamb as Assistant Commissioner; Major Doug Wilson will move to Support Operations Adjutant where he can use his skills as instructor and former SWAT member to enhance that portion of DPS; Major Walt Christian will assume the role of North Adjutant; and Major Chris Rodewolt will assume the role of South Adjutant. Commissioner Hitchens stated he is very excited with these changes, and he hated to lose Lt. Colonel Lamb but with skills as remarkable as his, he will do well at GEMA.

Regarding Trooper School, Commissioner Hitchens reported the 118<sup>th</sup> Trooper School will graduate 22 Cadets this afternoon; the 119<sup>th</sup> Trooper School is currently in week 8 and are down to 33 Cadets and will graduate September 5<sup>th</sup>; and the 13<sup>th</sup> Motor Carrier School is in its 8<sup>th</sup> week with 9 Cadets and is scheduled to graduate on July 11<sup>th</sup>.

Commissioner Hitchens shared on February 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> the Xfinity NASCAR race series took place at the Atlanta Motor Speedway and Troop D handled this detail entirely within their Troop. Commissioner Hitchens stated they did a phenomenal job and there were no issues.

Concerning the Legislative session, Commissioner Hitchens reported since the beginning of 2025, the Capitol Police Division has screened over 53,000 visitors, not including several thousand school children. Commissioner Hitchens added there have been 15 protests with an estimated 1,400 protestors since the session began, resulting in only 1 arrest.

Reporting on Specialty Units, Commissioner Hitchens advised the Aviation Unit conducted 54 flights in February, highlighting 2 of them. Commissioner Hitchens shared the Aviation unit assisted the US National Park Service in Cobb County on Kennesaw Mountain with fire suppression efforts on the 26<sup>th</sup>

of February and conducted multiple water drops with the helicopters; and they conducted a hoist rescue on the same day with a 53-year-old male on Blood Mountain in Union County who was suffering shortness of breath associated with an illness. He was extracted via the hoist and was turned over to ground units. Commissioner Hitchens noted this shows the depth of the Aviation Unit.

Commissioner Hitchens reported the K-9 Unit has 391 total deployments so far this year with 73 being patrol deployments, 107 narcotic deployments, and 211 sweeps, apprehending 45 people and having 10 bite apprehensions. Commissioner Hitchens noted the SWAT Team has had 28 calls for service so far this year and the Dive Team has had 11 calls for service, with 9 of those being for the missing boater on Lake Oconee. Commissioner Hitchens explained the primary mission of the calls on Lake Oconee were for the remote operated vehicle with the secondary mission of diving and checking any high probability targets. Commissioner Hitchens shared a lot of time was spent on the lake and it was extremely cold. Commissioner Hitchens added the Dive Team did a great job and he had just received a letter from Colonel England from DNR thanking DPS for the collaboration. Commissioner Hitchens noted he thinks this did nothing but strengthen the bond between our two agencies for when they lose somebody in the water or they have something on the water, we can work together.

The Crime Suppression Unit so far this year has recovered 29 stolen vehicles worth about \$809,000, has had 17 pursuits, has recovered 5 stolen firearms, apprehended 17 wanted people, and has had 28 felony charges.

This past Saturday, Commissioner Hitchens reported there were 24 state representatives, and 2 other state leaders do a ride-along in either the patrol car or helicopter in Atlanta, and they witnessed at least 2 pursuits. Commissioner Hitchens noted they appreciated the work the Troopers do, and it was a positive environment on both sides.

Regarding Fleet, Commissioner Hitchens shared the Mustangs are getting push bumpers, brackets, and skid plates installed so they should be totally ready to go; the Dodge Durangos have had a lot of recalls on them and as they mileage higher, there will be more and DPS is working on buying 88 2023 Dodge Chargers because there are no sedans out there, and these Chargers are on the lot, brand new with a warranty. Commissioner Hitchens advised these should bridge us until the new Chargers come out at the end of this year when we can order them. Commissioner Hitchens added DPS is going to try 5 new Ford Explorers to see how they perform.

Commissioner Hitchens reported the Department has been fortunate enough to be able to replace ballistic helmets for Troopers and Motor Carrier personnel, and a new stretch uniform is being tested by personnel. Commissioner Hitchens advised there is an issue with one of the DPS iconic symbols, the Straton hat, where there is a delay up to 6-9 months, so personnel are going to have to stretch them out and use them with care.

Concerning the radio system, Commissioner Hitchens shared about 95% of the local patches of agencies who want to tie into our radio system, which helps with interoperability, has been completed.

Regarding construction projects, Commissioner Hitchens reported the Headquarters Hangar is complete and we take final possession on the 18<sup>th</sup>; renovation on Post 8, the historical Post, is done and just a few small things need to be finished; Post 40, in Worth County is expected to be done the first quarter of this year; and the Mansion Post is complete minus some signage in the front.

Commissioner Hitchens shared the DPS awards ceremony is this weekend and the St. Patrick's Day parade in Savannah is Monday, adding 110 Troopers and Motor Carrier Officers will be detached to support Savannah PD. Commissioner Hitchens noted it will be an early and long day, but those along the parade route take care of our people and a lot of the Troopers/Officers ask to come back each year.

Mr. Charles Sikes asked if there will be representatives in the parade this year, to which Commissioner Hitchens stated there will be Troopers with specialty cars and the Honor Guard will march in it.

Mr. Roy Fickling asked how the Department's experience has been with the 412 helicopter, to which Commissioner Hitchens stated they are very happy with it.

Mr. Charles Sikes asked about the status of the original police academy historical marker at DPS Headquarters, and Commissioner Hitchens advised they have it but there was a mistake on it, so it has to be sent back, but it looks very good.

Director Chris Hosey, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, reported on some investigations going on around the state, specifically two investigations conducted by the Drug Enforcement Office and Gang Units in Southwest Georgia and the Middle Georgia Gang Unit, which resulted in extensive amounts of drug seizures and seized weapons, vehicles, and currency. Director Hosey noted the key in both of those instances is the partnerships, adding the one worked out of Middle Georgia involved many state agencies including GSP, Department of Community Supervision, and Department of Corrections.

Director Hosey shared the Child Exploitation Unit conducted "Operation Byte Down", which was a statewide multi-jurisdictional child exploitation operation that led to the arrest of 17 people being charged with sexual exploitation of children and other related offences. Director Hosey noted with that operation, which lasted over several days and weeks, there were 30 residential search warrants executed, and again, there were several partnerships involved.

Director Hosey advised the Region 10 office investigated the tragic death of a Roswell police officer who was killed in the line of duty last month, and it was 1 of the 12 officer involved shootings from January 1<sup>st</sup> through February 28<sup>th</sup>.

Director Hosey reported the Office of Special Investigations, which houses the Cold Case Unit, continues to do great work, adding there are 38 cold cases being reviewed or reinvestigated at this time. Director Hosey explained 15 of those requests were from designated family members through the protocols of the Coleman-Baker Act and 23 have been initiated from GBI investigations. Director Hosey added the Unit has also opened 13 unidentified remains cases and 3 of those have been identified.

Regarding vacancies, Director Hosey shared the Agency is in a hiring process right now for Agents; there are 23 Scientist positions vacant right now and each one of those are in some stage of the hiring process; and there are approximately 22 Chemists currently in training that will finish between now and June.

Director Hosey advised in the Investigative Division there have been 3,700 investigative cases up to this point in the fiscal year, and 523 were conducted in the month of January, and again, most of those cases are Crimes Against Persons and Other Investigations.

Director Hosey reported there were 35 Special Agent applicants who passed the assessment and have been interviewed and went to background and polygraph. Director Hosey added 29 completed those steps and will move on to Command Staff interviews, then into the hiring pool.

Concerning the Crime Lab, Director Hosey noted there was a 2% decrease in the backlog for January and the largest backlog is still in Chemistry, at about 78%.

Director Hosey announced in February, the Crime Lab's accrediting body, ANSI, approved a scope extension to the organization to include Rapid DNA at Headquarters and the Coastal Regional Labs. Director Hosey explained this achievement positions the Lab to begin testing evidence using Rapid DNA technology.

Director Hosey reported there are still 15 Medical Examiners in the ME's Office. Director Hosey stated their number of autopsies for the month of January went up from 354 to 406. Director Hosey noted the Fellowship Program continues to do well and continues to be a good source of locating doctors to fill vacancies in the ME's Office.

Director Hosey shared there were over 63 million CJIS transactions processed by GCIC last month.

Regarding facilities, Director Hosey reported the Georgia Public Safety Training Center storage building was completed in February and works well for putting equipment and supplies in one central location; the Region 1, Calhoun Office reconstruction project completion date has been rescheduled to April of this year; and construction on the Medical Examiner's expansion project at Headquarters is expected to start in May.

Director Hosey updated the Board on a plan being implemented to address the backlog in the Chemistry section of the Crime Lab. Director Hosey explained to give some perspective to it, about 77% of the backlog in the Crime Lab is in the Chemistry section, and that equates to 30,000 plus cases. There are also about 30,000 plus new submissions coming into the Chemistry section per year. Director Hosey shared back at the first of the year, they had the Crime Lab go in and pull some specific numbers and they were interested in what the percentage of the backlog looked like at the different Labs around the state and what kind of numbers that percentage translated to. Then they looked at each county across the state on that backlog. Director Hosey noted the goal was, can we attack the backlog situation another way and hopefully get better results. Director Hosey shared they

took a multi-pronged approach to it, adding one important thing needed to keep the backlog decreasing is to keep the positions filled with Chemists, and to work with prosecutors around the state in meeting their needs for the cases they need for prosecution. Director Hosey shared for example, one of the things they asked prosecutors to do is provide a list of cases they no longer need that the Crime Lab can strike and send back to the requesting Agency. Then that can come off the backlog or the list of cases that need to be processed or analyzed. Director Hosey stated last week, one prosecutor reviewed their list and did away with over 200 cases, and for that particular circuit, that was roughly half the backlog. Director Hosey stressed we do not want them to get rid of cases that has a need.

Director Hosey advised another aspect is, from this standpoint, if a prosecutor has 20 cases on her desk right now that are drug cases, likely she has nothing she can do with those cases to pursue because she has no Crime Lab report. Director Hosey stated the goal here is to give them something, which is to provide a preliminary test of the evidence that has been submitted. Director Hosey explained there are roughly two stages to drug testing; the mass spectrometry is first and the second is to verify the findings of the first. Then there is a wait, if needed, for the charges or for sentencing, then the purity level needs to be determined if it is cocaine. So, all those stages go for testing. Director Hosey stated we are looking at doing preliminary testing, which involves taking the drug, putting it into the mass spec and providing a report to the prosecutors or submitting agency that says based on this testing, this substance tested positive for “whatever”. This will give our prosecutors something to work with. Director Hosey added if it is something they really need to go to trial with, we do the full testing. If we get to that part, we are already ahead of the curve because we have already completed the first stage of the testing that needs to be done.

Director Hosey shared they ran some rough numbers and pulled two circuits in the state that they are going to start on in a couple of weeks, and the estimation is they should be done with those two circuits no later than August. Director Hosey advised they looked at the numbers originally on the backlog and estimated where they would get out of the backlog, providing scientists and submissions stay the same, and they were looking at FY30; however, when looking at taking this project and pushing it forward, they are looking at potentially ending the backlog at the end of FY27 (about), so they could cut 3 years off of it by doing that.

Director Hosey stated this will not work for every situation, but his thinking is if it can help with 10% of it, then it has helped with 10% of it and they have given prosecutors and their partners across the state something to work with.

Mr. Charles Sikes asked if the Cold Case Unit is where the retirees are being utilized, to which Director Hosey replied yes, 6 or 8 are being used.

Director Chris Wigginton, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, recognized Mr. Ara Baronian and Ms. Angela Batey for their roles in ensuring the Basic Mandate expansion kicked off on time, considering the last-minute approval of the curriculum. Director Wigginton stated the program is going very well.

Regarding the Use of Force section on the board report, Director Wigginton shared as GBI Agents go around the state and investigate the officer involved shootings, he hopes Agents are finding more officers articulate what has taken place because if you look at the report, there are over 20,000 students around the state with some type of use of force training. Director Wigginton stated this is 986 different offerings, most likely done in the local communities, some are on campus, but a lot are done in local communities in every corner of the state and that is how we get that many students in our programs; they are not having to drive hours to get to here, we are taking it to them. Director Wigginton noted 179 different agencies are represented in the numbers.

Regarding the Fire Academy, Director Wigginton reported it is doing fantastic, but if you look at what is going on with the federal government right now, a good bit of the funding for the Fire Academy is through the National Fire Academy. Director Wigginton advised they were notified this week that there are 6 classes currently being offered that have been cut, so they are working internally to find how to keep that afloat.

Concerning partnerships, Director Wigginton shared they held a resident agency meeting this week with all resident agencies, and if you aren't sure who those are, think of any state entity that touches public safety and they are here. Director Wigginton noted they sat down this week and talked about a lot of things. adding when the leadership gets out of the way sometimes it is amazing how good the people that work can get along and work together. Director Wigginton stated they almost had a disaster here last week when a neighbor was burning off some property and a wildfire spread onto the campus rather quickly, and if there was not an inmate running a backhoe start digging a firebreak, there is no telling how much of the campus would have been lost, because it was spreading fast. Director Wigginton added the Fire Academy activated their trucks and went out and helped the local community. Director Wigginton stated the local partnership that went from one inmate to several other inmates who dug the firebreak saved a lot of money and property.

**DONATIONS**

Ms. Lorri Smith, Georgia Department of Public Safety, requested approval of the following donation:

Three (3) Pepperball VKS Launchers	\$4,143.00	The Lowndes County Sheriff's Office
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The motion to accept these items was made by Mr. Willie Bolton, which was seconded by Mr. Roy Fickling and voted approved by the Board members.

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

Cash Donation	\$500.00	Georgia Arson Control Board
Carpeting	\$1,280.00	Flagship Carpets

