

BOARD OF PUBLIC SAFETY

March 5, 2026
Forsyth, Georgia

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mr. Stacey Cotton
Sheriff Jimmy McDuffie
Chief Leonard "Dee" Meadows
Commissioner Tyrone Oliver

OTHERS:

Ms. Tina Piper, 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 Walter Christian, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Major Chris Rodewolt, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Major David Bryant, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Major Doug Wilson, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Major Gary Langford, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Major Andrew Montgomery, Department of Public Safety/CVE
Captain Brandon Dawson, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Captain J.K. Crews, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Captain Jonathon Huff, Department of Public Safety/CVE
Lieutenant Brandon Brown, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Lieutenant Billy Schwab, Georgia Department of Public Safety
Sergeant Asher Gray, Georgia Department of Public Safety/GSP
Assistant Director Scott Dutton, Georgia Bureau of Investigation
Director Chris Wigginton, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Deputy Director Cheryl Greathouse, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Mr. Ike McConnell, Bureau Director, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Ms. Cindy Jones, Operations Bureau Director, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Mr. Ara Baronian, Section Director, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Mr. Adam Ham, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Ms. Sharla Shockley, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Ms. Andrea Y. Smith, Georgia Department of Public Safety

Vice-Chairman Ellis Wood called the March 5, 2026 Board of Public Safety meeting to order.

Mr. Ike McConnell gave the Invocation and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice-Chairman Wood informed Board members that Lt. Governor Jones has reappointed Mr. Richard Hyde to the Board of Public Safety.

Vice-Chairman Wood called for approval of the February 12, 2026 BPS minutes. Mr. Roy Fickling made the motion to approve the February 12, 2026 minutes. This was seconded by Chief Janet Moon and voted approved by the Board members.

DIRECTOR REPORTS

Commissioner Billy Hitchens, Georgia Department of Public Safety, reflected on the loss of first responders in the past few days: Hahira Police Officer Abney and Master Trooper Stien Davis, Jr. and Master Trooper Steven Perry, two North Carolina Troopers killed in the line of duty only 7 days apart, and Trooper Michael Diego of the Florida Highway Patrol. Commissioner Hitchens stated their service and sacrifice remind us of the risk our public safety professionals take every day and their families remain in our thoughts and prayers.

Commissioner Hitchens reported the 120th Trooper School will graduate with 30 Cadets tomorrow. Commissioner Hitchens noted 1 Cadet had a medical emergency when he picked up his patrol car so there will only be 29 graduating tomorrow, but he will be included in the ceremony as much as possible. Commissioner Hitchens also reported the 121st Trooper School began with 68 Cadets and is currently at 43 and they will graduate on September 4th. Commissioner Hitchens stated the Cadets have passed all the major hurdles and all that is left is academic. Commissioner Hitchens added the 15th CVE class began with 7 Cadets and all 7 are still in school and will graduate on June 5th.

Reporting on stats, Commissioner Hitchens shared Aviation conducted 23 searches with 11 subjects being located, they continue to hover around the 50% mark, which is admirable. Commissioner Hitchens reported Post 50, the Capitol, had 19 protests in February, with approximately 1,230 protestors, 160 manhours, and they are still at 0 arrests; the K-9 Unit still has 29 working dual canines and 2 are pending training which are replacements for one that retired and one that fell out of school. Commissioner Hitchens noted they have been active with 5 bite apprehensions this month and they have found 24 people. The Dive Team had 1 call for service from the Carroll County Dive Team who called to assist the fire department with a drowning victim in Douglas County in Sweet Water Creek. Commissioner Hitchens explained a shoplifting suspect attempted to run across a sewage pipe and fell in and did not come back up. Due to the 49-degree water and current, they asked our Team to come in with our SRV8 submersible, which is an underwater drone, and after about an hour, the suspect was located in about 8 feet of water.

Regarding the Cargo Theft Unit, which was created on February 1st, Commissioner Hitchens highlighted two cases. One resulted in 1 arrest on February 18th following intelligence received from a confidential informant regarding a planned theft. SFC Bell coordinated with the Forsyth County

Sheriff's Office, and they successfully apprehended the suspect during an attempted theft of a skid steer tractor. The stolen equipment was immediately recovered and returned to the construction site. Commissioner Hitchens stated the suspect has been linked to numerous similar thefts across multiple counties and the suspect's identification was relayed to affected jurisdictions to pursue appropriate charges in their respective cases. The other case was on February 26th when the Wilson County Sheriff's Office in Tennessee reported a theft of a commercial motor vehicle trailer. The suspect utilized a red tractor, entered the company yard, removed a loaded trailer containing a number of electronics including Apple products, computers, and televisions valued at \$1 million. Commissioner Hitchens stated at approximately 5:30 that afternoon the trailer was recovered on the side of the roadway in Temple, Georgia by the DPS Cargo Theft Unit. The cargo had unfortunately been offloaded in Georgia prior to recovery. On March 2nd, the Cargo Theft Unit identified the location where the stolen product was transloaded on to another CMV and also identified the suspect tail vehicle involved in the theft and some investigative contacts have been made and security footage has been obtained and reviewed.

Commissioner Hitchens reported the mobile spike strips are shipping on March 13th.

Mr. Charles Sikes asked how many of the mobile spike strips are being purchased and where will they be used, to which Commissioner Hitchens stated 10 were purchased and they will be put in places like CSU and Nighthawks.

Ms. Susan Treadaway commended the Cargo Theft Unit on their work.

Mr. Roy Fickling asked how the Fords have been received by Troopers and Officers. Commissioner Hitchens advised all the feedback on the Mustangs and Explorers have been positive.

Mr. Willie Bolton asked how far in the program are Cadets leaving, to which Commissioner Hitchens advised it is early on, mostly with people walking out the door.

Assistant Director Scott Dutton, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, reported the Gang Task Force in Columbus that involves multiple jurisdictions executed 18 search warrants in the middle of February on one operation where 13 arrests were made for cocaine, fentanyl, hydrocodone pills, methamphetamine, and over \$100,000 in cash and 14 vehicles were seized. The suspects in this case were residents of Muscogee and Harris Counties, but the trafficking organization covered Middle Georgia up to North Georgia with its impacts.

Assistant Director Dutton shared the defendant in the Tara Baker murder case was found guilty on all 12 counts last month. Assistant Director Dutton reminded everyone the Tara Baker case from 2001 remained unsolved for a great period of time and the Coleman-Baker Act was created to allow families to request opening or taking another look at cold cases or cases over 3 years old with no particular type of activity.

Assistant Director Dutton reported in the Colin Gray case, the father received a conviction after a two-week trial. Assistant Director Dutton stated from the get-go, the DA's office was very steadfast on how they wanted to proceed, and they did a phenomenal job.

Assistant Director Dutton also reported yesterday, a suspect was arrested in a homicide on a 16-year-old case out of Douglas, Georgia where a 32-year-old mother of 4 was murdered in her workplace. The Cold Case Unit worked with the local police department to work through the evidence and were able to identify a suspect.

Assistant Director Dutton advised there have been 17 officer involved shootings since January.

Concerning the current environment threat as it relates to activities going on in Iran, Assistant Director Dutton shared he has reached out to the Fusion Center (GISAC) on operations and from the standpoint of preparation and planning with the World Cup coming up, St. Patrick's, the country's 250th anniversary, the masters, etc., the likelihood of individuals in the US with intentions of doing harm are a concern. Assistant Director Dutton stated the Agency has been in steady contact with military bases across the country.

Regarding staffing, Assistant Director Dutton noted numbers are at the best he has seen, adding about 10 years ago we were down about 100 Agents from what we have now, so it has taken a while to get to where we are now. Assistant Director Dutton shared the Medical Examiners are currently at 6 on staff with 3 vacancies which are currently being recruited for, and interviews are being set up for the next couple of weeks; also, there is an Agent School in progress with 9 agents graduating on April 30th.

Assistant Director Dutton reported on the Crime Lab backlog, sharing it is still there and elevated, but we can see a difference as it relates to our Chemistry Section/Drug ID, where it is at about 67%, down from 80% percent. Assistant Director Dutton shared there is an emphasis on hiring Scientists in Chemistry and Forensic Biology with DNA.

Assistant Director Dutton noted GCIC remains very active in keeping systems operating as they should, working with GBI vendors and other jurisdictions' vendors to make sure they are compatible and talk to each other. Assistant Director Dutton also shared GCIC continues with their audits and required training to operate the system. Assistant Director Dutton stated currently GCIC keeps up with the Sex Offender Registry and the Protective Order Registry, and legislature is looking at adding a Domestic Violence Registry as well that will be another GBI responsibility.

Regarding Facilities, Assistant Director Dutton reported the major building project at Headquarters, the expansion of the Medical Examiner's Office is well under way, and it is anticipated it will be open and ready for business in early 2027.

Mr. Charles Sikes asked what constitutes a major case call out, on the investigative division side, to which Assistant Director Dutton explained those are the ones typically received after hours that require more than 1 Agent on a deployment.

Ms. Susan Treadaway asked how many judicial circuits have signed on to the new preliminary testing protocol to which Assistant Director Dutton stated they have completed 2 and are working through 4 or 5 now, and they have been successful.

Mr. Fickling asked how the GCIC downtime has been. Assistant Director Dutton stated it is still an ongoing issue and a lot of time the issue is with external vendors.

Director Chris Wigginton, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, reported there are several construction projects going on around the Center. Director Wigginton advised if you drive around the Training Center, in front of the DJJ building, is where the new basic training building is being built. Director Wigginton stated this will probably be about a two-year project and it will instantly relieve a majority of the scheduling problems on campus concerning classrooms. If you continue on around at the Firearms Complex, that used to be the Hogan's Ally Range, it has been turned into 3 tactical training areas called pits, and where we put individual officers in a moving type situation instead of standing on a flat range and shooting, which is something that has been needed for quite some time. Continuing to the next road on the left, which is Bomb Range Road, at the top of the hill, Director Wigginton stated the land being cleared is where the new DPS training building will be; then up toward the kennels is where the new mock village will be built. Director Wigginton explained the water lines and power lines are already in, the roads have been paved, and there are building sites for 3 single dwelling homes that will be built that resembles a lot of the property that is constructed around Georgia and there will be several concrete pads to put mobile homes on. Director Wigginton noted the mobile homes will be used for a magnitude of training up to the point that they are set on fire for the Fire Academy, put in a scrap metal bin, hauled off, then have new mobile homes brought in.

Regarding training, Director Wigginton shared historically use of force training used to be going to the range, talking for 1 hour about the use of deadly force, and only deadly force, then you go out to the range and qualify with your sidearm and you go home. However, Director Wigginton stated use of force is so much more than that, so about 5 years ago, the Center re-shaped how it delivers use of force in Georgia and that is what a lot of the new classes and mobile classes have become, and teaching law enforcement about use of force, not just deadly force, is about officer presence, de-escalation, and all the way down to simple articulation when writing reports.

Director Wigginton shared this week in the General Assembly there was some testimony going on and someone in one of the public safety committees stated some inaccurate information regarding the Center was given and Director Wigginton stated the legislature was very quick to defend us. Director Wigginton advised what they were saying was, we do not train enough people and we can always train more, but that takes 3 things: facilities, people, and money and we are maxed out on all 3 of those unless we get more; and secondly, a majority of our training focus was on state agencies, which is where the inaccurate statement is. Director Wigginton stated he was able to pull the numbers and produce a document that shows over the last 10 years our state contribution is about 10-11%, the other 89-90% are locals from municipalities and counties, which is what we are here for.

Director Wigginton reported in the legislation this year, in the amended budget, the Center did receive funding to open the academy in metro which was formally North Central in the Douglas and Paulding Counties area that closed.

Mr. Willie Bolton asked regarding the annexing and the increase in training, how will it affect the Center's ability to provide meals and lodging, to which Director Wigginton stated he did not think it will affect the scheduling and with DPS vacating the building it will open some space.

Mr. Charles Sikes, Mr. Willie Bolton, and Vice-Chairman Wood commended Director Wigginton and his training staff for the great job they are doing.

DONATIONS

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

Various Household Furniture	\$2,000.00	City of Palmetto
2015 Chevrolet Tahoe	\$3,000.00	Prosecuting Attorneys Council
2014 Ford Edge	\$500.00	Prosecuting Attorneys Council
2014 Ford Edge	\$500.00	Prosecuting Attorneys Council
2011 Ford Crown Victoria	\$2,000.00	Prosecuting Attorneys Council
2007 Ford Crown Victoria	\$1,000.00	Prosecuting Attorneys Council
2005 Ford Crown Victoria	\$1,000.00	Prosecuting Attorneys Council

The motion to accept these items was made by Mr. Willie Bolton, which was seconded by Chief Craig Tully and approved by the Board members.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Mr. Willie Bolton made the motion to enter into Executive Session, which was seconded by Chief Craig Tully and voted approved by the Board members.

Upon the conclusion of Executive Session, Vice-Chairman Wood asked for a motion to approve returning to Open Session. Mr. Roy Fickling made the motion to return to Open Session, which was seconded by Mr. Billy New and voted approved by the Board members.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Craig Tully
Secretary