

BOARD OF PUBLIC SAFETY
September 12, 2024
Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Forsyth, Georgia

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Willie Bolton
Mr. Stacey Cotton
Mr. Roy H. Fickling
Mr. Richard Hyde
Chief Janet L. Moon
Commissioner Tyrone Oliver
Mr. Charles D. Sikes
Ms. Susan K. Treadaway
Chief Craig Tully
Mr. Ellison G. Wood

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:

Sheriff Jimmy McDuffie
Chief Leonard “Dee” Meadows
Commissioner Michael Nail
Mr. Billy New
Sheriff Joey Terrell

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 Josh Lamb, Department of Public Safety
Major Robert Balkcom, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Major Doug Wilson, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Major Gary Langford, Department of Public Safety/Capitol Police
Major David Bryant, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Captain Brandon Dawson, Department of Public Safety/GSP
SFC Billy Schwab, Department of Public Safety/GSP
SFC Raul Mejia, Department of Public Safety/GSP
Director Chris Hosey, Georgia Bureau of Investigation
Assistant Director Scott Dutton, Georgia Bureau of Investigation
Deputy Director Rhonda Westbrook, Georgia Bureau of Investigation/GCIC
Director Chris Wigginton, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Mr. Ara Baronian, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Mr. Ray Ham, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Mr. Adam Ham, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Ms. Angela Batey, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Ms. Cindy Jones, Georgia Public Safety Training Center
Ms. Clare McGuire, Georgia Department of Public Safety
Ms. Sharla Shockley, Georgia Public Safety Training Center

Vice-Chairman Ellis Wood called the September 12, 2024 Board of Public Safety meeting to order.

Vice-Chairman Wood called out the names of Law Enforcement and First Responders in Georgia recently killed in the line of duty, along with the victims of the Apalachee High School shooting the previous week, asking everyone to remember them.

Mr. Adam Ham gave the Invocation and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice-Chairman Wood called for approval of the July 11, 2024 BPS minutes. Chief Janet Moon made the motion to approve the July 11, 2024 minutes. This was seconded by Mr. Roy Fickling and voted approved by the Board members.

Mr. Charles Sikes made a brief presentation regarding Patriot's Day.

DIRECTOR REPORTS

Commissioner Billy Hitchens, Georgia Department of Public Safety, reported in response to the recent school shooting in Winder, personnel from Troop/Region C, Posts in Monroe, Gainesville, and Hartwell, as well as personnel conducting K-9 training nearby responded to the school and arrived fairly early and helped Barrow County Deputies. Commissioner Hitchens noted in events like this, there is always a chance for egos to show, and he stated there were none there, noting GBI, GEMA, and Barrow County were there and were plugged in ensure we knew exactly what needed to be done. Commissioner Hitchens stated he was proud to see that. Commissioner Hitchens added DPS will continue to conduct school checks throughout the state this school year to have a presence.

Concerning Trooper Schools, Commissioner Hitchens advised the 117th Trooper School graduates 39 Cadets tomorrow at the Public Safety Training Center, noting their successful completion of Trooper School reflects their commitment to serving and protecting the citizens of Georgia; the 118th Trooper School is in week 8 of their training with 29 Cadets. Commissioner Hitchens added the school started with 54 Cadets and the Department has retained 17 of those who will be able to return to a future Trooper School; and the 119th Trooper School will begin January 12, 2025 and the hiring process is being completed with 70-75 Cadets being eligible.

Commissioner Hitchens reported the 12th Motor Carrier School is currently in its 16th week with 8 Cadets, noting it started with 14.

Commissioner Hitchens shared TFC Blake Shiver fell ill and went to the hospital and quickly learned he needed a new heart. TFC Shiver was sent to Atlanta, and he did not leave the hospital until he got a new heart. Commissioner Hitchens stated he visited TFC Shiver at the hospital and he was thinking a guy with open heart surgery would be laying there and not moving but Blake could not sit still, and his main goal was to tell them how quickly he was getting back. Commissioner Hitchens reported everything is looking great for him. He has a long road ahead, but he says he is coming back.

Reporting on stats, Commissioner Hitchens shared Aviation has conducted 214 flights, 37 searches, and found 16 suspects. Commissioner Hitchens also noted Aviation provided a lot of support and responded to numerous requests in southeast Georgia during Tropical Storm Debby. Commissioner

Hitchens reported the Bell 412 hoist was received but was damaged in shipping and after it was fixed, someone was sent to pick it up and it is now repaired and back in service.

Commissioner Hitchens reported the Middle Georgia Gang Task Force has arrested 16 wanted persons, recovered 17 guns, has made 15 felony drug arrests, and recovered 4 stolen vehicles; the K-9 Unit has 51 total K-9s in the state and regarding apprehension, there have been 41 people found or arrested, and 11 bite apprehensions; the Criminal Interdiction Unit on August 8th worked with the DEA in Atlanta, the GBI, and the Department of Agriculture to seize more than 1,300 kilos of methamphetamines, which is the largest single methamphetamine seizure in the history of the DEA Atlanta office; the SWAT Team continues to be busy with over 100 calls for service this year with 11 murder suspects being apprehended; the Dive Team has had 16 calls for service; the Crime Suppression Unit has apprehended 6 murder suspects, recovered 131 stolen vehicles, 33 stolen firearms, arrested 104 wanted suspects, and has had 184 felony charges.

Regarding projects, Commissioner Hitchens reported concrete is being poured at the Headquarters Hangar and it will be ready in December 2024; Post 8, Madison the historical Post, should be done in December 2024; Post 18, Reidsville is essentially done but with the AT&T strike there is no phone or internet, but when that is complete, it will be ready to move in; Jekyll Island's Public Safety Complex is not complete but the ribbon cutting date is October 28, 2024; Post 40 in Worth County is slow going but has an estimated completion during the first quarter of 2025. In Communications, the statewide CAD is scheduled to begin in October; the statewide radio system has had positive feedback and results, but the dispatch portion of the system has been delayed due to the AT&T strike.

Mr. Charles Sikes asked about the status of the old Police Academy Memorial at DPS Headquarters, to which Commissioner Hitchens stated the pylon is built and the signs have been ordered.

Vice-Chairman Wood thanked Commissioner Hitchens for the support of the Aviation unit following Tropical Storm Debby.

Mr. Willie Bolton asked about the status of the new Post in Oconee, to which Commissioner Hitchens advised it is in the design phase and hopefully some construction will start soon.

Director Chris Hosey, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, shared when he received word of the school shooting last week a great state response took place that day and there were Agents and Troopers on scene, including 12 different GBI work units that responded and at least 5 crime scene specialists. Director Hosey noted the first day, GISAC analysts came in and set up leads tracking to see what was done and the results, and by midnight the first night there were around 400 leads. Director Hosey stated crime scene specialists conducted over 100 scans during crime scene examinations, and on Thursday afternoon some of the finishing results were available. Director Hosey added the leads continue to be put together and the Case Agent reported interviews are still being conducted and analyzed.

Regarding the number of threats to schools going around the state, Director Hosey advised GISAC analysts have been working on tracking them and getting them to the proper agencies for follow up.

Director Hosey reported the drug office out of Metter charged four Candler County residents for methamphetamine and other charges. Director Hosey also shared the Human Exploitation Trafficking Unit (H.E.A.T) arrested 17 people in Operation "Wrong Room" as part of a nationwide effort called "Coast to Coast" which involved 26 states.

Director Hosey advised the Cold Case Unit, as part of the Coleman-Baker Act, has reviewed 32 cases, noting 13 of the cases were from designated family members and 19 were GBI initiated, and 12 unidentified remains cases have been opened in hopes of identifying the victims with Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy.

Director Hosey reported from January 1st to August 31st of this year, there has been a total of 60 Officer Involved Shootings.

Director Hosey shared on August 19th, there was a meeting at GBI Headquarters with a panel of District Attorneys and Deputy Director Cleveland Miles from the Crime Lab and other Crime Lab personnel to talk about how the different sections of the Crime Lab operates and how the backlog is being addressed. Director Hosey stated Crime Lab personnel wanted to know the needs of prosecutors around the state and to have them understand what efforts are being taken to address the backlog. Director Hosey advised the goal is to do the same thing with a panel of sheriffs and police chiefs to get information out there so when there are questions, they can understand.

Director Hosey announced the promotion of Melissa Hehir to Assistant Manager in the Macon Crime Lab; Special Agent in Charge Trent Hillsman to Inspector in the Investigative Division; and the appointment of Special Agent Chris Davis to Special Investigator in the Office of Professional Standards.

Director Hosey reported they are working diligently to fill vacancies within the Agency, noting the Crime Lab is down to 25 vacancies for Scientists and currently 12 of those 25 have been hired at the first of the month and the remainder of those vacancies are somewhere in the hiring process, adding when that finishes all 25 vacant positions within the Crime Lab will be filled.

In the Investigative Division, Director Hosey stated 22 vacancies are showing right now but there is an Agent School starting later this month with 20. In GCIC, Director Hosey noted there are 9 positions that will be filled as soon as possible.

From the Investigative Division, Director Hosey reported "Crimes Against Person" and "Other Investigative" categories, which is a collaboration of a lot of things, shows a majority of investigations being worked is 37 and 38 percent respectively for those two areas, and "Drug Investigations" is at 14%. Director Hosey shared the next Basic Agent Academy will be the 53rd class and will start September 23rd with graduation in December, adding there are 45 currently in the hiring process.

Director Hosey advised the Crime Lab backlog number of submissions and number of completed cases did go down in the month of July mainly due to transitioning to the new case management system; Medical Examiners positions are at 15, and there are two within the fellowship program that started earlier this year that are interested in staying with the GBI, which will put 17 of the 19 doctor positions filled.

Director Hosey noted the CJIS transactions for GCIC is at over 71 million through July. Director Hosey added the GCIC team does a great job of ensuring the messaging switch has been completed. The GCIC Symposium was cancelled due to Tropical Storm Debby and is re-scheduled for October.

Regarding construction projects, Director Hosey reported the Headquarters MEO expansion design services is scheduled for completion in December 2024; the Region 1, Calhoun office new construction is scheduled for completion in January 2025; the Columbus Gang Unit located a building to assist the City of Columbus and is awaiting an agreement with the city; and the Cold Case Unit had furniture put into their new work unit this week.

Ms. Susan Treadaway complimented Director Hosey on their response to the school shooting and the work of the H.E.A.T. unit, and shared appreciation for their team working with the District Attorneys. Ms. Treadaway also complimented GCIC Director Rhonda Westbrook and her staff for the work they do.

Mr. Roy Fickling complimented Director Hosey on their response to the school shooting. Mr. Fickling asked if there are any plans to expand the Crime Lab to be able to hold more Scientists. Director Hosey stated they are looking at all the labs and there are some that can be expanded fairly easily.

Chief Janet Moon thanked Director Hosey and his staff for the work they do and remarked the level of professionalism and response to the school shooting put the state of Georgia in the most favorable light.

Mr. Willie Bolton commented when the after-action report is completed from the school shooting, he hopes the cooperation and relationship between all the agencies is mentioned and explained how it all came together.

Director Chris Wigginton, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, reported in regard to the school shooting, the two officers that engaged and talked with the suspect had recently attended some of the active shooter training at GPSTC. Director Wigginton stated this training prepared them for the situation that day. Director Wigginton shared the State School Board Association has been scheduled for months to have partnerships on how we talk about school safety, and he thinks a lot of people are starting to realize law enforcement and educators have two very distinct jobs but we cannot do our jobs without each other and without communicating with each other.

Director Wigginton mentioned he just returned from a trip to Kansas City with the National Tactical Officers Association as a recruiting effort to find instructors. Director Wigginton stated what he found

was Texas, Ohio, Iowa, Nebraska, just to name a few, found our booth and said they have heard about what has been done in the state of Georgia in revamping the SRO program, and they wanted to know if they can come to Georgia or if we can go to them to revamp what they have.

Director Wigginton shared one of the classes taught at GPSTC is active shooter training, or ALERRT. Director Wigginton added one of the problems with ALERRT is it requires four individuals going into a school at one time but sometimes, in rural Georgia for example, you do not have four officers available and it may be a long time before someone can get there to respond. Director Wigginton stated they came up with a class called SORAS (Single Officer Response to an Active Shooter). Director Wigginton noted there was a class in progress last week when the school shooting took place and they paused for a minute to talk about it. Director Wigginton asked Mr. Ray Ham, Police Academy Division Director, to share some of the reviews the students gave on the class. Mr. Ham read several positive reviews given by students during the SORAS class, which had 12 students at the time.

Regarding the basic mandate expansion starting in January, Director Wigginton stated they are prepared.

Director Wigginton noted the Fire Academy is about three quarters of the off-site training the Training Center conducts, adding they just received a grant for a new tanker truck for the Fire Academy.

Mr. Stacey Cotton thanked Director Wigginton for what they do with teaching and leading future leaders in law enforcement.

REAPPOINTMENT

Vice-Chairman Wood called for a motion on the reappointment of Mr. Willie Bolton. Commissioner Tyrone Oliver made the motion to reappoint Mr. Willie Bolton to the Member-at-Large #8 Seat. This motion was seconded by Mr. Stacey Cotton and voted approved by the Board members. Mr. Willie Bolton abstained from the vote.

Mr. Willie Bolton thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve on the Board and for the friendships. Mr. Bolton acknowledged the Department of Corrections and all the other Department heads for taking the importance of their jobs seriously.

Chief Craig Tully made a motion to adjourn the Board of Public Safety meeting and go into the Georgia Crime Information Center Council, which was seconded by Mr. Roy Fickling and voted approved by the Board members.

GEORGIA CRIME INFORMATION CENTER COUNCIL

Ms. Rhonda Westbrook, GCIC Division Director, Georgia Bureau of Investigation, presented the FY2024 CJIS Security Policy Violations report for the Georgia Crime Information Center, which involves unauthorized access and dissemination of criminal justice information. Ms. Westbrook

reported there were violations for 32 agencies reported during FY2024. Ms. Westbrook presented the request for approval of actions taken to resolve security policy violations for FY2024 to the BPS members for their approval.

Mr. Stacey Cotton made the motion to accept the GCIC's recommendations for the FY2024 GCIC Security Policy Violations, which was seconded by Mr. Willie Bolton and voted approved by the Board members.

Commissioner Tyrone Oliver made a motion to adjourn the GCIC Council and return to the Board of Public Safety meeting, which was seconded by Chief Craig Tully and voted approved by the Board members.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS

Ms. Clare McGuire, Department of Public Safety, requested approval of a Resolution for the Georgia Department of Public Safety to authorize the Commissioner of Public Safety to enter into negotiations, appropriate agreements, and all contracts and supporting documents as necessary to enable Screven County to convey by deed to the State of Georgia a tract of five acres of real property, together with improvements thereon, for the purposes of and on which to construct a new GSP Post 21, and further to enable DPS to facilitate the improvement of such land for and the construction of such new headquarters and barracks for Georgia State Patrol Post 21 - Sylvania.

The motion to accept this Resolution was made by Mr. Roy Fickling, which was seconded by Mr. Willie Bolton and voted approved by the Board members.

Ms. Clare McGuire, Department of Public Safety, requested approval of a Resolution for the Georgia Department of Public Safety to authorize the Commissioner of Public Safety to enter into negotiations, appropriate agreements, and all contracts and supporting documents as necessary to enable Ware County to convey by deed to the State of Georgia a tract of two acres of unimproved real property on which to construct a new GSP Post 22, and, further, to enable DPS to facilitate the improvement of such land for by the construction of such new headquarters and barracks for the new Post 22-Waycross.

The motion to accept this Resolution was made by Chief Craig Tully, which was seconded by Mr. Roy Fickling and voted approved by the Board members.

Vice-Chairman Wood shared the Board of Public Safety made a donation to the Georgia Sheriffs' Youth Home in memory of Retired DPS Colonel Sid Miles who recently passed away.

Commissioner Tyrone Oliver, Georgia Department of Corrections, acknowledged the partnership within agencies, reporting they had a Corrections Officer stabbed in the Valdosta area and the response from the Georgia State Patrol Post and Motor Carrier Unit escorting the officer to the hospital was very much appreciated.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Craig Tully
Secretary