

## **BOARD OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

March 13, 2008  
Atlanta, Georgia

### **BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Vice-Chairman James E. Donald  
Mr. Wayne Abernathy  
Mr. Rooney L. Bowen, III  
Sheriff Steve Cronic  
Sheriff Bruce Harris  
Mr. Pat Head  
Chief Dwayne Orrick  
Mr. Ellis Wood

### **BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Chief Lou Dekmar  
Mr. Dub Harper  
Mr. Bud Black  
Sheriff Cullen Talton

### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

Mr. Joe Drolet, Board Attorney  
Ms. Laura Jones, Board Liaison  
Colonel Bill Hitchens, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol  
Major Mark McDonough, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol  
Mr. Joe Hood, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol  
Ms. Melissa Rodgers, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol  
Chief Mark McLeod, Motor Carrier Compliance Division, DPS  
Mr. Lee O'Brien, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol  
Mr. Dan Brown, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol  
Director Vernon Keenan, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Mr. Mike Fordham, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Mr. Dan Kirk, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Deputy Director Paul Heppner, Georgia Bureau of Investigation  
Director Dale Mann, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Ms. Patrice Kerner, Georgia Public Safety Training Center  
Mrs. Kathy Wood, wife of Mr. Ellis Wood  
Mr. Geronald Bell, Office of Planning and Budget  
Mr. Wiley Gammon, Georgia Tech Police Department

Vice-Chairman James Donald welcomed everyone to the March meeting. Vice-Chairman Donald started with recognition of guests. Mr. Ellis Wood introduced his wife, Mrs. Kathy Wood.

Vice-Chairman Donald called on Mr. Ellis Wood to lead the group in prayer. Mr. Wayne Abernathy then led the group in saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice-Chairman Donald requested a motion to approve the February Minutes. Sheriff Steve Cronic made a motion to approve the Minutes, which was seconded by Chief Dwayne Orrick, and voted approval by the Board members.

### **DIRECT REPORTS**

Colonel Bill Hitchens, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol, began with announcing the promotion of Mark McDonough to Major and Commanding Officer of State Patrol Division, which is the largest division within the Department of Public Safety. Colonel stated Major McDonough has always been a high achiever; is from Rabun County; graduated from high school as class valedictorian; had full scholarship to Georgia Tech but turned it down to accept an appointment to United States Naval Academy where he graduated four years later; served six years in Marine Corps as jet pilot and flew about 35 combat missions in Iraq; received two medals with Combat B for Valor; left Marine Corps to become affiliated with State Patrol; worked at Blue Ridge as supervisor there and assistant post commander; flew helicopters in Aviation Unit; re-wrote the whole organizational manual for Aviation section when he was there. Recently, Governor's Commission For New Georgia reviewed all aviation activities in state government and they pronounced that State Patrol had the best operations manual in all state government for aviation. Major McDonough spent last three years as Colonel's executive assistant. When Colonel Hitchens took this job over Department of Public Safety, he asked who was the brightest guy in the Department and the responses were Mark McDonough.

Colonel Hitchens reported the second thing is an organizational change in the Department. Each Board member was given copies of the old org chart and the new org chart. The large copy is the new proposed chart, with one change, and that is the Special Operations Unit. Mr. Rooney L. Bowen, III made a motion to approve the organizational change, which was seconded by Sheriff Bruce Harris, and voted approval by the Board members.

Colonel Hitchens reported what has occurred with the agency regarding the revised budgeting. Department of Public Safety is fortunate that the agency was not hit too terribly hard, but few items were cut that had been requested. The first cut was \$1 million for vehicles for FY 09, which means 50 less cars. The second thing is \$2.5 million out of the cadet program; a program essential in keeping manpower numbers up and to achieve the numbers that Governor Perdue set forth for the agency to achieve within his term. Colonel Hitchens and staff have spoken with Office of Planning and Budget; the agency will hire only for critical positions. Instead of hiring radio operators, the agency is opting to hire cadets into those positions. Over the next two to three years, the agency will go to regional system where the agency will only have one dispatch center for each troop. What the agency will have is a regional center with twelve to fifteen

operators. If the agency hires new cadets, they will be on track to go to trooper school and the new cadets will be utilized as radio operators. This will enhance their ability in doing well in trooper school.

Colonel Hitchens reported that several members of the Board went to Tallahassee to look at the Operation Center that Department of Highway Patrol has had down there in place for eight years now. Last night, the Georgia State Patrol Committee held a meeting and the Board members expressed their pleasure at what they saw; impressed with the capability. Mr. Rooney L. Bowen, III added that he, Sheriff Bruce Harris, Mr. Wayne Abernathy, Mr. Joe Hood, and Mr. Dan Brown made the trip to Tallahassee. Mr. Bowen stated that first of all, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement was a very hospitable group; bringing in everybody to talk to and demonstrate everything on the system. Mr. Bowen stated they came away with two things; first, that Georgia State Patrol could see what to look forward to; and second, Georgia State Patrol saw what has been missing for so long. Florida has been in this system for about eight years fulltime. There is one advantage in that Georgia will learn from Florida's mistakes. The Comm Center that was toured covers to Pensacola, over to I-75, down to Suwanee, and over to Panama City, which is a huge area. This was being done with the Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. The tour group got to watch the computer aided dispatch system in place. Their troopers are on a board, when they are moving around, the operator sits and watch them on that board. The operator dispatches the trooper to some type of situation, the trooper car turns green to yellow and, when he gets on the scene, the trooper car turns to red on the board. Then, when the trooper makes the stop and puts in a tag number and pushes a button, everything is done. There is no communication on the radio; it is all done on the computer. Mr. Bowen stated it is really remarkable. The tour group learned of monetary savings and learned negotiation techniques; there will be a good bit of money saved on this process. Florida has agreed to send a Florida trooper to the April Board meeting and show a car that is fully equipped; the trooper will demonstrate the capability of sending everything back to Florida. The Board members will be able to view the process from patrol car aspect. Mr. Bowen stated it was a good trip and learned a lot; there is nothing but good things that could come out of it. Colonel Hitchens stated that the great thing is if dealing with a crisis situation or if there is possible loss of communication, then Tallahassee could switch over to Miami or Orlando and the troopers in Florida would not even know that anything changed. Colonel continued with stating that they also dispatch for other law enforcement agencies in Florida, although they charge a fee for that. In response to a question, Colonel Hitchens stated Florida's communication system was funded by appropriations from their legislators. Mr. Bowen added there is a two-fold purpose on that issue; i.e., Florida started this program on running the broadband part through their radio system and the broadband ended up not being wide enough for something like this; so Florida had to go to wireless internet to make this work; and second, the money that Florida spent to implement the program, the cost is fractional now on what they had to spend to get their system up because the technology has changed so much. Colonel Hitchens stated State Patrol could enhance its radio communication with motorbridge, but since it is line driven, to go to 800 mhz would cost about \$300 million. The system similar to Florida would cost much, much less. With motorbridge, State Patrol could still get some 800 mhz capability to have interoperability, but that will not be primary source of

information. Florida had told the group that very seldom do they interact on radio, since there is computer capability. Responding to a question of the next step, Colonel Hitchens stated funding is in place; an initial presentation was done to the Appropriations Committee.

Colonel Hitchens invited everybody to attend the 71<sup>st</sup> Anniversary celebration for Department of Public Safety; a swearing-in ceremony for Lieutenant Colonel Snellings and a pinning ceremony for Major Mark McDonough will be held at the same time. This will take place on March 19<sup>th</sup> at the north wing of State Capitol.

Director Vernon Keenan, Georgia Bureau of Investigations, began with touching on the same issue, which is the budget situation. As everyone knows, the Governor had issued a press release announcing the slow down in revenue collections and the impact this will have on budget process. All agencies subsequently received a letter from Office of Planning and Budget directing the state agencies to restrict hiring for non-critical positions and to reduce discretionary expenditures in travel contracts and other areas as deemed appropriate. Director Keenan stated that there will be additional information coming forward on the standards for filling the critical positions. Director Keenan stated Governor Perdue released a revised budget, which outlined additional cuts in the budget which was submitted to the General Assembly. As it relates to GBI, Governor removed \$990,000. One area is removing \$125,000 to purchase laptop computers for agents, which the purpose was to cut down on driving time and save in the motor fuel budget. Also, Governor Perdue deleted funds to fill three vacant toxicology scientists positions and two evidence technicians at the GBI headquarters lab. As has been presented to the Board members at a previous time, Director Keenan stated these positions are vital to death investigation process because toxicology is a key part for the medical examiners. Further, the Governor reduced the general salary increase for state employees from 2.5% down to 2%. In addition, while Governor has made his recommendations of deleting budget items from various state agencies, the Public Safety Appropriations Subcommittee also had a hearing and called all the agencies in and asked for detailed information on the number of vacancies that each agency had; vacancies of authorized positions that are unfilled; and that the information be provided immediately. Additionally, the agencies were tasked with going back and identifying areas where budget cuts could be recommended. Also, it will be difficult for state agencies to receive funding for new positions and for capital improvement projects. Director Keenan stated that is the lay of the land of what is going on. Even though Director Keenan does not know what the outcome will be, he stated that with Governor's Budget of deleting items for GBI, those areas selected were the least priority areas for GBI. The Governor still maintains the budget for new agents to work identity theft and for new DNA scientist positions. Director Keenan stated he will keep the Board informed to where the budget situation is in GBI.

Director Keenan reported that the GBI is going to be awarded a \$1.1 million grant from the Office of Homeland Security. The grant will be received on behalf of local law enforcement agencies in a GEMA area. The grant will be to implement a pilot project to use wireless

biometric devices, so that when local law enforcement encounters a suspect or individual and they want to check the identity to see if the person is wanted, that the biometric fingerprint would be captured and transmitted wirelessly to a computer system and identification made. This is something that is directly applicable to patrol officers. The GBI has agreed to take on the project of behalf of local law enforcement because it is a good pilot project for something planned for in the future. This Homeland Security money belongs to local law enforcement. They agreed with the GBI's position that the GBI would only undertake the project if it was competitively bid out, which is going to happen with this amount of money; and that the GBI would use it as a segway into future program. The Automated Fingerprint Identification system for State of Georgia is getting outdated and Director Paul Heppner and his staff are now embarked on a project to identify what it would take for State of Georgia to modernize its AFI system. This is something that GBI supports on behalf of local law enforcement. Director Keenan stated the GBI believes the \$1.1 million wireless biometric project is a great way to begin modernizing the entire system. The irony of this is, even with taking the new pilot project, that because AFI is so outdated, the GBI cannot support it. An officer with a wireless device cannot transmit a fingerprint to the state AFI system, because AFI system is not modern enough to handle that. What GBI will do is establish a separate database of the involved agencies where they refer, for example, fingerprints for wanted persons; and when encountering an individual on the street whose identity they suspect, that fingerprint will be transmitted by wireless; and the database will come back with a match if that is the case. Director Keenan stated he will update the Board in the future, as the GBI progress with both these projects.

Director Dale Mann, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, began with couple of things. He stated he has tragic news; there has been the first occasion of a firefighter dying during training exercise. The firefighter was 48 years old; in a cold exercise, going through the first module of Basic Firefighting course; was from Homerville and worked for the volunteer fire department; and in real good health. The firefighter formerly had been a master sergeant in the Marine Corps; was an avid runner; occupation-wise he managed a Napa Store in Homerville. There were no indications of any bad health; no indications of previous medical history. There has been a good internal investigation just to document who was there and what happened. Director Mann stated they are waiting on the pathologist report. A non forensic autopsy was done at Medical Center of Georgia. The firefighter collapsed about 9:30 a.m. on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February. An Automatic Defibrillator was put on him; the AUD said do not shock; so started CPR; did rescue breathing; quickly brought out an ambulance; put the firefighter in the ambulance and carried to Monroe County Hospital; and he had a weak pulse at the hospital. The medical team at the hospital tubed the firefighter, put him on a ventilator, stabilized him, still had a weak pulse; and early that afternoon transported to the Macon Medical Center. The next day the firefighter's organs started to fail; so, the family made the decision to discontinue the advanced intervention. The firefighter passed away that afternoon. Director Mann attended the funeral, and, the Valdosta Fire Department helped the Training Center and the family get through this. The firefighter's son is also a volunteer firefighter in Homerville, along with full time works for the

Homerville Police Department. The family is devastated. Director Mann stated this is the first time that the Training Center had somebody collapse and later expire within 24 hours while doing training exercises. There have been two other events; death is not uncommon for the Training Center. This is, unfortunately, the first time to have somebody collapse during a training exercise. Director Mann stated the report on cause of death is not back yet; however, there is nothing to indicate there is anything more than just an aneurism.

Director Mann stated one of the things is the Training Center is still doing more than twice the number of students every day that will be billed for. The Training Center was built based on anticipated daily attendance of 500. However, now there are 1,000 to 1,300 students every day. The chapel has been turned into a classroom, and, the conference center has been turned into a classroom. The Training Center is out of space. When looking at the Training Center's report in the notebook, the Training Center prepared 112,000 meals in February. The food service workers start at 3:00 in the morning and shut the kitchen down around 10:00 or 10:30 at night. The report shows that 58% of those meals go to the prison; the population has about doubled in the last twelve months. About 32% of those meals go to staff and students; the other 10% go to the county jail.

Director Mann stated there is one issue to bring to the Board members; he will get with the subcommittee to look at the issue. There have been law changes in the past two years with the Firefighters Act; more specifically, Senator Mullis put in a Senate bill which changes and creates new certification of Fire Service, one of which is the Fire Inspector. This has not been as recognized certification in law before Senator Mullis introduced the bill. It has now reached the point where this Board, as a matter of policy, needs to go back and look again at who the Training Center approves for lodging and meals. Director Mann stated that the Board members will remember that for years when the Basic Communication Officers came to the Training Center, they were not given free lodging and free meals. Three years ago, Director Mann got the General Assembly to put in enough money in the continuation budget to allow to pay for lodging and meals for Basic Communication Officers. The Training Center now has folks routinely showing up, such as Fire Inspectors, to go to classes. The other issue to look at is consistency. With peace officers, for example, the student is either a peace officer according to P.O.S.T. or not. Either the student has a BLE number or some kind of number that P.O.S.T. has on file to show that the student is in compliance with Title 35A. Now, what the Training Center is seeing is that there is a requirement under that Senate Bill that volunteer firefighters do not have to become certified, but do have to register. Director Mann thinks that is one of the things to look at; if the student is a volunteer firefighter but not registered with Firefighters Standards and Training, could that be one of the things used to determine whether to get free meals and lodging. The argument will be that they are out of compliance with the state law. Director Mann mentioned this just as a heads up; and will put a subcommittee meeting together before the next Board meeting. These issues will be brought to the Board members and let them have a say on these issues; because it will sooner or later get to the point that somebody's feelings will be hurt when not getting free lodging and meals. In response to a question of average cost of meals, Director Mann stated the Training Center bills at \$26 per day, which is \$14 for dorm and \$12 for

the meals. The average cost per meal is very low; there is more in the meal than what is actually charged for meals. The figures are around \$3.25 for breakfast, \$4.50 for lunch, and \$4.50 for dinner. The Training Center gives a break to the Department of Corrections on what is charged for meals because they provide inmate labor to prepare the meals. Mr. Abernathy questioned what is the oath of a volunteer fireman when he signs on to be a fireman, is he under obligation; questioning this due to recent situation of 33 Banks County volunteer firemen quitting this week. Mr. Wayne Abernathy asked that if a major fire occurred in the community and if there was major damage and if there was a roof collapse, then whose responsibility would that be; would be on those 33 firemen because they had taken an oath? Director Mann responded he would find out what the oath specifically states. Director Mann stated about 70% of firefighters in state are volunteers; only 30% are paid firefighters. Chief Dwayne Orrick added that P.O.S.T. Council has stated that last year there were 600 more applicant requests to process of peace officers than in 2006; an increase of 600 applicants. Director Mann stated that is exactly what the Training Center is looking at; however, he understands that Department of Technical and Adult Education is looking to proceed with their plan for training. He understands that DTAE has picked the six DTAE sites to look at offering basic training.

### **DONATIONS**

Mr. Joe Hood, Department of Public Safety/Georgia State Patrol, requested approval of the following donations:

Four Stalker DSR 2X Radars	\$11,036.00	Bartow County Commissioners
Two Stalker DSR 2X Radars	\$ 5,820.00	Chattooga County Commissioners
Two Stalker DSR 2X Radars	\$ 5,820.00	City of Trion
Three Blackberry Curve Devices with continuing service	\$ 1,050.00	Gordon County Commissioners
One Stalker DSR 2X Radar	\$ 2,999.95	Dooly County Commissioners

Mr. Rooney L. Bowen, III motioned approval of the donations, seconded by Mr. Wayne Abernathy, and voted approval by the board members.

Ms. Patrice Kerner, Georgia Public Safety Training Center, requested approval of the following donations:

100 Feet of 30 Inch Drainage Pipes	\$ 2,500.00	Advanced Drainage Systems
Cash Donation for Fire Fighter Weekend	\$ 400.00	Red Dog Public Safety Outfitters

Sheriff Steve Cronic motioned approval of the donations, which was seconded by Mr. Wayne Abernathy, and voted approval by the Board members.

Director Dale Mann invited all the Board members to attend the Fire Fighter Weekend; there will be about 500 firefighters attending this weekend. The group will honor the fallen firefighters at their Memorial Service on Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup>.

### **OLD/NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Rooney L. Bowen, III made a motion, because of the passing of Board Member Gene Stuckey, that a Resolution be done in his honor; and to coordinate with Ms. Jill Stuckey for a presentation to her. Mr. Wayne Abernathy seconded the motion and the Board members approved.

The April Board meeting will be held on April 10<sup>th</sup> in Glennville. The event begins with lunch at Mr. Wayne Dasher's house, followed by a board meeting at Smith State Prison at 1:00 p.m.; followed by attending the Law Enforcement Appreciation Supper hosted by Mr. Wayne Dasher. Vice-Chairman Donald stated it is worth going down to Glennville just to get the special rice that Mr. Dasher makes. Mr. Abernathy added that it is a special treat to go to Mr. Wood's house for breakfast. Vice-Chairman Donald stated the Board of Corrections will also be meeting in Glennville on April 11.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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Rooney L. Bowen, III  
Secretary