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Progress Report

June 2001 Report No. 01-29

Florida Highway Patrol Fails to Achieve Savings or Demonstrate Impact of Adding Troopers

at a glance

In 1999, we recommended that the Florida Highway Patrol avoid $842,036 in hiring costs and save $833,823 annually by

- **hiring civilians for court liaison, polygraph examiner, and public information officer positions;**
- **modifying the dispatcher dress code;**
- **using a networked garage company;**
- **changing to a single standard color for patrol cars; and**
- **assigning sedans instead of pursuit vehicles to administrative staff.**

These savings are still achievable. However, FHP has realized only $9,159 per year by partially implementing one recommendation. The patrol has begun issuing sedans instead of pursuit vehicles to administrative staff, but it has failed to follow the other recommendations.

Furthermore, the patrol needs to establish a demonstrable link between new trooper positions and measurable outcomes such as shorter response times, decreased crashes, and reduced drunk driving.

Purpose

In accordance with state law, this progress report informs the Legislature of actions taken by the Florida Highway Patrol in response to findings and recommendations in our 1999 justification review. [1, 2]

Background

Motor vehicle travel results in more fatalities and injuries than all other forms of transportation combined. The Legislature established the Florida Highway Patrol to reduce the dangers of motor vehicle travel. To accomplish this mission, staff patrol the highways, investigate traffic crashes, make arrests, assist other law enforcement officers, and provide safety education and training. The Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles administers the patrol.

[1] Section 11.45(7)(f), *F.S.*

[2] *Justification Review of the Florida Highway Patrol of the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles*, OPPAGA Report No. 98-87, June 1999.

Prior Findings

In our 1999 justification review, we identified several management and operational changes that could reduce costs.

- Hiring civilians for court liaison, polygraph examiner, and public information officer positions would save $222,784 annually in fringe benefits and avoid $842,036 in hiring costs.
- Up to $195,408 could be saved annually by modifying the dispatcher dress code.
- By using a networked garage company, the patrol could save $170,000 annually.
- Changing to a single standard color for patrol cars would save $219,820 annually.
- Assigning sedans instead of pursuit vehicles to staff that are primarily administrative could save $25,811 annually.

OPPAGA also identified staffing issues that need to be addressed so that critical information is collected for assessing if new troopers are needed.

Actions Taken

FHP has begun to realize savings by assigning sedans instead of pursuit vehicles to administrative staff. During the 2000-01 fiscal year, as part of its regular fleet replacement cycle, FHP purchased 11 sedans instead of pursuit vehicles for administrative staff, thereby saving the state $9,159 per year over the five-year life of the cars. The agency plans to replace an additional 20 pursuit vehicles with sedans, as we recommended, over the 2001-02 and 2002-03 fiscal years. By implementing this policy, the FHP will save the state $25,811 annually.

Actions Not Taken

FHP has not reclassified the court liaison, polygraph examiner, and public information officer positions to civilian status. The patrol reports that because it is below staffing levels recommended by its staffing formula, it is unwilling to reclassify these sworn positions to civilian status.[3] The patrol agrees that civilians could fill court liaison and polygraph examiner positions, but not at the expense of losing sworn staff. Consequently, FHP requested additional funding to hire civilian court liaison officers and to privatize the polygraph examiner positions. Both requests were denied. The patrol continues to assert that civilian information officers would be less effective than sworn officers and does not plan to reclassify the positions. We disagree. Sworn officers are not needed for these administrative positions. We recommend that the Legislature reclassify these three types of positions from certified officer to civilian and thereby save $222,784 in fringe benefits each year and avoid $842,036 in hiring costs.

FHP has not modified the dispatcher dress code. Although the patrol continues to pilot test the use of washable, less formal uniforms in its Orlando Communications Center, it has not implemented a new statewide dispatcher dress code. Given the high cost of formal patrol dispatcher uniforms and dry cleaning allowances ($1,022 per employee per year), the dispatcher staff turnover rate of approximately 50% per year, and the concern that dispatcher staff may be mistaken for armed officers, we continue to recommend that the Legislature save $195,408 per year by eliminating funding for dispatcher uniforms.

[3] FHP uses a staffing formula developed by Northwestern University Traffic Institute. As described later in this report, formula assumptions may overstate the need for additional officers.

FHP has not contracted with a networked garage company for car parts and repairs. Agency purchases of fleet maintenance services are fragmented and do not take advantage of volume purchasing. The agency hopes to develop a volume discount contract early in the 2001-02 fiscal year. We recommend that the Legislature reduce the patrol fleet maintenance budget by 10% to encourage the agency to contract with a networked garage company, which could save $170,000 annually.

FHP has not adopted a single standard color for its cars. Directed by law to make its vehicles a distinctive color, the patrol has historically custom painted its cars. However, the patrol could accomplish a savings of $219,820 per year (using its standard vehicle replacement cycle) if it purchased new cars in a standard manufacturer solid color and affixed distinctive decals instead. If the Legislature wishes to accomplish this savings, it should revise s. 321.02, *Florida Statutes*, to delete the distinctive color requirement.

The patrol has failed to demonstrate the impact of adding troopers. The FHP has repeatedly requested funding for additional troopers. For example, for Fiscal Year 2001-02, FHP requested 108 sworn law enforcement positions. The Florida Legislature did not fund this request.

The information currently collected by the FHP is not sufficient to evaluate how the patrol's performance would improve with additional staff. The patrol uses a staffing formula developed by the Northwestern University Traffic Institute as evidence of the need for more troopers. However, this formula does not show a demonstrable link between more troopers and measurable outcomes such as improved response times, decreased crashes, and reduced drunk driving.

Our 1999 report recommended a pilot study in which the patrol would collect such performance data and strategically deploy staff to demonstrate the benefit derived from additional troopers. We recommend that the patrol fill its vacancies and strategically deploy these troopers to one area of the state.[4] This area should have the "optimal" number of troopers, as defined by the staffing formula. Using this optimal number, FHP should collect data demonstrating how performance indicators improve with the added staffing. This information will allow the Legislature to accurately evaluate how more troopers would change patrol performance.

[4] As of April 30, 2001, the Florida Highway Patrol had 97 vacancies.

The Florida Legislature

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