

Some DPS troopers failed polygraph test, officials reveal

Commission chairman orders review of recruiting process.

By [Mike Ward](#)

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Some Texas Department of Public Safety troopers have been hired despite failing polygraph tests on their background checks, while others have been hired after admitting to past criminal behavior, agency officials said Thursday.

With legislative pressure already on DPS officials to ensure that state troopers meet the highest standards, officials made a number of disclosures at a meeting Thursday with the Public Safety Commission, which oversees the department.

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Among them:

Some members of the current training academy class of more than 100 failed polygraph tests on background checks. Others who failed polygraphs have been hired in the past.

Some recruits in the past were accepted after they admitted to past criminal behavior during interviews, even if they were never arrested or charged.

"More than a handful" were rejected by other law enforcement agencies before they applied to the DPS.

Others have been promoted from the training academy and put to work despite recommendations from training supervisors that they be dismissed.

"Wow!" said Commissioner Ada Brown of Dallas, after hearing the details at the meeting.

Despite some recruits' deception on the polygraph tests, "you give him a badge?" she asked Capt. Phillip Ayala, who was in charge of recruiting, and human resources director Paula Logan. "I have a problem with that."

So did the rest of the commission, which voted unanimously to examine the agency's hiring policies and recruitment.

Just hours earlier, the Senate Finance Committee had asked DPS officials to focus on the agency's hiring standards and to avoid compromising to hire lower-quality applicants. The department has been experiencing a shortage of troopers, but DPS officials said Thursday that they were committed to the highest hiring standards.

"We want a top-to-bottom review of every aspect of the recruiting process," Chairman Allan Polunsky said.

DPS officials said Thursday that they had no details about the failed polygraph tests, the members who admitted criminal behavior or the number of those troopers currently serving the department.

According to the department's requirements for entrance into the training program, "a final conviction for any misdemeanor crime of domestic violence or felony will automatically disqualify applicant."

Agency officials said they had not hired any convicted felons but that some recruits had admitted criminal behavior in their past before they were hired. They said the cases were an isolated few.

Most of the exceptions to the hiring policy, agency officials told the commission, were made at the behest of top administrators who were not named. Polunsky said Col. Stanley Clark, named interim director last September and hired permanently Thursday, changed the policy last fall to block those exceptions.

"I am very troubled by this process," Polunsky said. "It leads me to believe, in polite terms, that we've been letting a lot of people into the academy to fill spots, to make numbers."

mward@statesman.com; 445-1712