

Aviation Division

The Aviation Division extends the reach of the TBI across the state, providing critical support during searches, investigations, and emergency responses. This capability enhances situational awareness and allows for timely assistance when conditions demand speed and precision.

Behind each flight is extensive preparation, coordination, and training. The division's work often unfolds beyond public view, but its impact is felt when rapid response and specialized support make a meaningful difference for communities and partner agencies.



The TBI's Aviation Division plays a critical role in supporting public safety across the state – providing aerial capabilities that enhance situational awareness, strengthen coordination, and support law enforcement operations when it matters most.

In 2025, the division reached an important milestone, transitioning from a standalone unit to a fully established division. This evolution reflects both the growing demand for aviation resources and the increasingly vital role airborne operations play in modern investigative work. With this transition came expanded responsibilities, enhanced capabilities, and a renewed commitment to supporting law enforcement partners across Tennessee.

Building Capacity for the Future

The 2025 state budget further demonstrated the Bureau's commitment to aviation operations by funding four new positions to establish an additional flight crew of Mission Pilots and Mission Systems Operators. Mission Pilots will also cross-train as Mission Systems Operators, creating a more versatile and resilient team. This investment ensures the division can meet increasing operational demands while maintaining high standards of safety, readiness, and technical proficiency. As the division continues to grow, its mission remains constant: providing reliable aerial support to local, state, and federal partners across Tennessee.

Operational Excellence in 2025

Despite ongoing organizational changes, the division maintained a high operational tempo throughout the year. Aircraft and crews supported a wide range of missions, demonstrating the value of aviation resources in time-sensitive and complex situations.

One of the year's most significant missions took place in Moore County, where aviation personnel assisted in

locating a missing elderly man exposed to severe winter conditions. Using onboard technology, the flight crew identified a heat signature in a wooded area, enabling ground teams to reach the individual quickly and prevent a potentially tragic outcome.

Supporting Complex Operations

The Aviation Division also played a key role in the Memphis Safe Task Force operation, a multi-agency effort focused on reducing violent crime. Working alongside local, state, and federal partners, aviation crews provided aerial surveillance, real-time situational awareness, and live video feeds to the Joint Operations Center.

From active incidents to coordinated enforcement actions, the division's presence enhanced officer safety, improved communication, and supported more effective decision-making in dynamic environments.

Major Investigations & Specialized Support

The division also provided critical assistance during the Austin Drummond manhunt in West Tennessee, delivering sustained aerial coverage that supported ground teams during an extensive search operation. In addition to tactical support, aviation resources were used to aid time-sensitive investigative needs. In one instance, the division transported Rapid DNA kits from Lexington, Kentucky, allowing investigators to begin identifying remains as soon as the scene was secured, accelerating the investigative process and providing timely answers to families.

Looking Ahead

As the Aviation Division enters its first full year as a formal division, its focus remains on expanding capabilities, strengthening its team, and continuing to meet the evolving needs of law enforcement across Tennessee.

