



Bruins 3, Penguins 4, Final

In wake of deadly crash, Mass. suspends more than 500 licenses

By [Matt Stout](#) and [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated July 1, 2019, 6:06 p.m.

For at least 15 months, Registry of Motor Vehicles officials ignored tens of thousands of alerts that Massachusetts-licensed motorists had broken driving laws in other states — including for drunken driving and other serious infractions — and instead stuffed them, apparently unread, into mail bins inside a Quincy office building.

As a result, at least 540 drivers who should have had their Massachusetts licenses suspended for driving under the influence elsewhere were allowed to stay on the road, and officials still don't know the total number of notifications that were ultimately missed, according to a still-unfolding review into the bureaucratic failures within the RMV.

The stunning findings, detailed by Governor Charlie Baker and his top transportation aide at a Monday news conference, point to a mushrooming crisis within the Registry, whose longtime leader [resigned last week](#) and where officials have raised the possibility of a host of state and federal probes.

“This failure is completely unacceptable to me [and] to the residents of the Commonwealth who expect the RMV to do its job and track drivers' records,” Baker said Monday.

Officials launched the review in response to the case of Volodymyr Zhukovskyy, a 23-year-old West Springfield truck driver who faces seven counts of negligent homicide after allegedly crashing into a group of motorcycle riders, killing seven, last month in Randolph, N.H.

Baker administration leaders acknowledged the RMV should have terminated Zhukovskyy's Massachusetts commercial license and that it had failed to act on a notification from Connecticut officials after he was arrested there, six weeks before the New Hampshire crash.

But in reviewing the case, state officials discovered the problem extended far beyond simply processing commercial license alerts.

Since March 2018, no one at the RMV had been tracking paper notifications sent by other states when a Massachusetts motorist is cited or charged there. Instead, they "simply sorted them into mail bins" and put them into a records room in the RMV's Quincy headquarters, according to a memo written by acting RMV Registrar Jamey Tesler and MassDOT's top attorney. It's there where officials last week discovered more than 53 bins containing tens of thousands of individual notices, all organized by month of arrival.

"These papers seemed to have been put aside without being looked at," said Stephanie Pollack, Baker's transportation secretary.

Pollack couldn't say Monday why RMV personnel stopped processing the alerts in March 2018. The same month, officials had signed up to join a voluntary electronic notification system created by the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators, though the majority of states have not joined and still send paper notifications, Pollack said.

After reviewing the files, the state has processed 655 suspensions involving 546 unique individuals' licenses, all of which involve alcohol-related offenses, Pollack said.

Officials warned they are still sorting through other high-priority cases that don't involve alcohol, indicating the number of suspensions could grow. Pollack said the ultimate number of those who are "potentially ineligible" to drive is in the hundreds "not in the thousands."

In an unprecedented move, state officials say they are now cross-referencing all 5.2 million of its license holders at one time with a federal database of motor vehicle infractions. They're also digging through RMV archives to determine whether any missed notifications predate March 2018, and plan to bring in an outside auditor to do an "end-to-end review" of processing out-of-state alerts, Baker said.

In response to the problems, they are also processing any new notifications within a day of receiving them.

Officials noted that they regularly process Massachusetts license suspensions, with 36,076 "suspension actions" being issued in May alone. As part of the ongoing review, they also checked a backlog of 365 notices generated for commercial driver's licenses, none of which had been checked by RMV personnel. But the vast majority were duplicates of other reports and only one — Zhukovskyy — had required an automatic suspension.

But a host of other issues remain. The responsibility of checking notifications had been left to the RMV's Driver Control Unit, but it fell behind amid an "apparently substantial backlog" and transferred the job in the fall of 2016 to the Merit Rating Board, which maintains the state's driving records, according to the RMV memo. Officials said Monday they have yet to determine the status of those older cases from 2016.

The questions come as Baker is dealing with another transportation emergency at the MBTA. A Red Line car derailment on June 11 has thrust that line into what's expected to be months of delays, prompting him to propose a [plan to speed up fixes at the beleaguered agency](#).

Baker, who spent [most of last week in London](#), appeared to acknowledge Monday that faith in his administration's handling of transportation issues has been battered by the dual crises.

"I think we have a lot of work to do to earn back some of that," he said.

Baker said officials will also brief the state's Office of the Inspector General, the US Department of Transportation's inspector general, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration on the RMV's issues. Doing so, he said, will "allow them to conduct their own reviews of the Registry's planned changes."

On Beacon Hill, other state leaders indicated they will hold off on their own inquiries as Baker's review unfolds. That includes state Auditor Suzanne Bump, who a spokesman said hasn't made any decisions about launching an investigation "in this realm."

"For right now, we are working closely with the administration," Senate President Karen E. Spilka said Monday after a meeting in which Baker updated the Legislature's leadership on the situation. "They are doing a very thorough review of the situation."

House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo said lawmakers are "anxiously awaiting" more updates on where "there may have been a failure."

“I don’t think we have enough information at our disposal in terms of whether this . . . would require further legislative review,” he said.

There are also still unanswered questions about Zhukovskyy’s record. He has been charged in at least six states with impairment or traffic violations, including in Ohio, where [he pleaded guilty in 2014](#) to driving with a suspended license, speeding, providing false information, and possessing drug paraphernalia. At the time, his license was suspended in Massachusetts for drunken driving.

Records in the Ohio drug case include a notation that officials were “to notify Massachusetts” of Zhukovskyy’s troubles. However, details of the 2014 conviction don’t appear on his Massachusetts driving record, though it references an unspecified December 2016 matter from Ohio.

Read the memo:

To print the document, click the "Original Document" link to open the original PDF. At this time it is not possible to print the document with annotations.

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