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RMV suspends hundreds more Mass. licenses amid internal review

By [Laura Crimaldi](#), [Matt Rocheleau](#) and [Vernal Coleman](#) Globe Staff, Updated July 12, 2019, 10:01 p.m.



More than 1,600 Massachusetts drivers have had their licenses suspended since the Registry of Motor Vehicles launched an internal review last month, following a deadly crash that raised questions about the agency's operations. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2018

Hundreds more Massachusetts drivers had their licenses suspended this week amid a growing scandal at the Registry of Motor Vehicles, officials acknowledged Friday, while revealing that the agency had also failed for years to notify other states when their drivers ran afoul of local driving laws.

The RMV's latest disclosure exposes additional lapses in the agency's oversight of errant drivers, as well as a virtually nonexistent system to exchange information on violators across the country.

As of Friday, the state has suspended the licenses of 1,607 drivers, nearly double the number reported last week. The drivers should have had their licenses suspended some time ago, but they weren't, officials have said, because tens of thousands of paper notices from other states were apparently unopened and left to languish in mail bins at the RMV's Quincy office.

"It is hard to imagine a more egregious example of the RMV being derelict in their duty than not even being able to open the mail," said Jason K. Levine, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, a nonprofit, Washington, D.C.-based consumer safety group.

"Whether due to incompetence or malfeasance these failures have cost lives. To protect everyone on the road — and not just in Massachusetts — changes must be made," he said.

The review of RMV practices was spurred by a deadly New Hampshire crash last month allegedly caused by a 23-year-old Massachusetts truck driver who shouldn't have had a commercial license because of a previous arrest in Connecticut. RMV officials later acknowledged that they had received notifications from Connecticut's registry, but had failed to promptly review and suspend Volodymyr Zhukovskyy's commercial license.

Meanwhile, the agency released new details Friday that raise safety concerns about an untold number of drivers in other states across the country.

“There is no evidence that the RMV has (at least not for many years) had a consistent practice of sending out mail or electronic notification of violations or suspension actions taken in Massachusetts to other states in ‘real time,’ ” said the memo from Marie Breen, general counsel for the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, and Jamey Tesler, the acting registrar.

Instead of alerting other states when their drivers committed a traffic offense, the Massachusetts RMV entered the information into the National Driver Register, a computerized database used by states to determine whether a driver faces sanctions for traffic offenses, according to the memo.

The register is checked when a person applies for a license or renewal, according to the National Highway Traffic Administration website, meaning an operator could drive for months or years without being scrutinized by the system.

For the time being, the Massachusetts RMV plans to mail alerts to other states whenever out-of-state drivers are suspended in Massachusetts, the agency’s memo said. It also plans to develop an electronic notification system using ATLAS, the software platform that the Registry began using in March 2018. In addition, the agency is stepping up its review of repeat offenders of drunken-driving laws, which means there could be more new suspensions, officials said.

Spokespeople for the registry and Governor Charlie Baker’s administration have declined to answer questions this week about RMV operations. The Department of Transportation, which oversees the RMV, sent the latest update Friday afternoon.

A Baker spokeswoman issued a statement noting that the governor “ordered an immediate review of the RMV’s state to state data sharing, has been briefed continually on the review process and placed Secretary [Stephanie] Pollack in charge of the effort to bring in an independent auditor and address the unacceptable lapses at the Registry.”

State lawmakers plan to hold an oversight hearing this month to examine the Registry’s failures.

“This report is very troubling. These issues have serious safety repercussions,” House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo said in a statement Friday. “The scope and depth of the troubles at the RMV warranted oversight from the Legislature, and these latest revelations further reinforce that notion.”

The RMV appears to have never had a “consistent practice of mailing notifications to others states,” the agency’s memo noted.

Meanwhile, a review by the Globe found 20 other states that send their out-of-state notifications by mail.

Information about out-of-state convictions for commercial — truck, van, or bus — drivers is shared nationwide through the electronic Commercial Driver’s License Information System. There is no equivalent system for noncommercial driver licenses.

Massachusetts is one of five states that doesn’t participate in the Driver License Compact, an interstate agreement requiring motor vehicle agencies to alert other states about driver violations. But those four other states told the Globe that they send violation notifications in the mail, meaning Massachusetts has been the only national outlier.

The Registry has faced a reckoning since June 21, when Zhukovskyy allegedly plowed into a group of motorcyclists on a New Hampshire highway.

Many of the victims belonged to the Jarheads Motorcycle Club, which plans to hold a memorial service Saturday in a parking lot at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough.

Longtime Registrar Erin Deveney resigned last month, and soon after transportation officials uncovered more sweeping, systemic problems at the agency.

On July 1, officials revealed that no one at the Registry had been tracking paper notifications sent by other states when a Massachusetts motorist is cited or charged there since at least March 2018. Instead, workers “simply sorted them into mail bins.”

A review of the notifications so far resulted in 2,039 suspensions for 1,607 Massachusetts drivers, the agency said Friday. That’s nearly double the number of suspended drivers from last week when Pollack put the total at 876 licenses.

The state is in the process of running all 5.2 million Massachusetts licenses against the National Driver Register.

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