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# RMV has suspended 869 more driver's licenses, pushing total to more than 2,400

By [Laura Crimaldi](#) Globe Staff, Updated August 15, 2019, 8:39 p.m.



Acting Registrar Jamey Tesler answered questions from lawmakers as Stephanie Pollack, the state's transportation secretary, looked on. JESSICA RINALDI/GLOBE STAFF/GLOBE STAFF

Massachusetts is mailing delinquent notices to other states for 45,000 convictions and suspensions levied on out-of-state drivers since March 2018, the Registry of Motor Vehicles said Thursday. It will also suspend an additional 869 licenses of local drivers amid a still-widening agency scandal.

An eight-page memo released Thursday marked the first time the Registry has quantified how many convictions and suspensions had been issued against out-of-state drivers but had received no follow-up because of the agency's administrative failings.

The agency said the sanctions cover "all offenses administrative and egregious," but didn't provide further details.

"Everyone knows we're talking about thousands of missed messages, and that's really the ultimate bottom line here," said state Representative William Straus, House leader for the Legislature's Joint Committee on Transportation.

The Registry had gone years without a system for alerting other states of local violations. It is now scrambling to address its lapses after a 23-year-old truck driver, whose commercial license should have been suspended by Massachusetts, allegedly collided in June with a group of motorcyclists in New Hampshire, killing seven. In that case, and in thousands of others, the agency had failed to log and act on warnings from other states.

Jamey Tesler, the acting registrar, also revealed Thursday that more than 2,400 Massachusetts drivers have had their licenses suspended retroactively for incurring traffic violations outside the state. The number of suspensions could continue to grow.

The latest suspensions, the Registry said, come via what officials say is an unprecedented review of roughly all 5.2 million Massachusetts driver's license holders. The RMV said it is running each driver's name against the National Driver Register, a computerized database of drivers who have been sanctioned for serious traffic violations.

“We have been working hard to ensure that all drivers — commercial and regular — meet state and federal requirements for eligibility to drive and that, if a driver commits a serious offense that affects eligibility for licensure, the Registry expeditiously revokes their driving privileges,” Tesler wrote in the memo.

The ultimate goal, Tesler said, is “to ensure that all Massachusetts driving records are as accurate and complete as they can be.”

Straus on Thursday criticized state transportation officials under Governor Charlie Baker for not responding quickly enough to records request from his committee, which is investigating the Registry. Straus said the committee is trying to understand how the push to reduce customer wait times at Registry offices affected the agency's ability to address its public safety mission.

Tesler wrote that nearly 50,000 pages had been handed over as of Wednesday, but Straus insisted key records are still missing.

“Specifically, the administration has yet to provide documents which go to the central questions of when, at what levels of authority and why, major decisions were made within the administration to direct RMV resources away from its public safety responsibilities,” he said in a statement.

The number of license suspensions has ballooned steadily amid the agency's internal probe, and could increase even more. Tesler said the Registry is trying to gather more information about records for 2,889 drivers who could face suspension based on new information revealed in its investigation.

A preliminary report from an outside auditor is expected later this week, Tesler wrote.

The thousands of license suspensions are the byproduct of a scandal that has engulfed the Registry since late June. In the wake of the fatal New Hampshire crash, officials revealed the Registry should have stripped Volodymyr Zhukovskyy of his commercial license in May, after he was arrested in Connecticut for operating under the influence and refused a chemical breath test. Connecticut authorities alerted Massachusetts about the incident, but the agency failed to review the notice and suspend Zhukovskyy's commercial license.

Zhukovskyy has pleaded not guilty to negligent homicide charges and is being held without bail in New Hampshire.

As the Registry delved into its failures with Zhukovskyy's case, officials learned tens of thousands of notices about traffic violations committed by Massachusetts drivers in other states had languished, apparently untouched, in 72 boxes at the agency's headquarters in Quincy.

By Monday, Tesler wrote, the Registry hopes to have two supervisors in place to lead the newly created Out-of-State Processing Notifications Unit. The division, which will employ a total of six people, will be responsible for processing alerts from out-of-state licensing agencies and sanction licenses accordingly.

The Registry also wants to hire a chief compliance officer and a director of policy, Tesler wrote. The job listings for the positions were published last Monday.

About half of Tesler's memo was devoted to the Merit Rating Board, a division within the Registry that was established in 1976 to manage Massachusetts driving records and provide that information to auto insurers and government agencies.

For a brief time, the Merit Rating Board also processed out-of-state notifications, a responsibility it took over from the Driver Control Unit, another division within the Registry.

The Merit Rating Board abandoned that job all together in March 2018 because it needed to catch up on a backlog of up to 27,000 citations from within Massachusetts, according to testimony given last month at a legislative oversight hearing.

One of the most notable revelations in the hearing came from Brie-Anne Dwyer, an auditor at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation.

At the hearing, Dwyer testified that in March she found nearly 13,000 alerts about out-of-state notifications awaiting action in an electronic inbox.

Tesler's memo, issued Thursday, sought to add context to that figure, writing that the alerts were "duplicates of roughly 2,500" out-of-state notifications that had been scanned multiple times into the computer system the Registry began using in March 2018. The backlog, Tesler wrote, was cleared after the New Hampshire crash.

At the legislative hearing, Thomas Bowes, the director of the Merit Rating Board, insisted his staff couldn't keep pace with its workload and wasn't provided with additional staffing power.

But Tesler, in his memo, said the Registry's new computer system produced a "significant reduction" in how much information Bowes's workers must process manually. Staffing levels in the unit have remained steady, he said.

Still, workload continues to be a challenge at the Merit Rating Board, Tesler wrote, noting there are "22,000 work items" that require attention.

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