

We shared our findings with state agencies. Suspensions, investigations, and reviews soon followed

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) Globe Staff, Updated August 18, 2020, 9:05 a.m.



Oncoming traffic on an August night in Cambridge. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

efore the Globe published a word of its [“Blind Spot” investigation](#), state officials suspended the licenses of dozens of troubled drivers across the country. At least four motor vehicle agencies and court systems launched investigations into

B their failure to flag thousands of dangerous drivers. And officials reached into their files to update the records of convicted killers.

Globe reporters had scoured driving records and crash data to find that drivers across the country were escaping punishment — and remaining on the road — due to bureaucratic neglect. The failures put the public at risk, sometimes with deadly consequences.

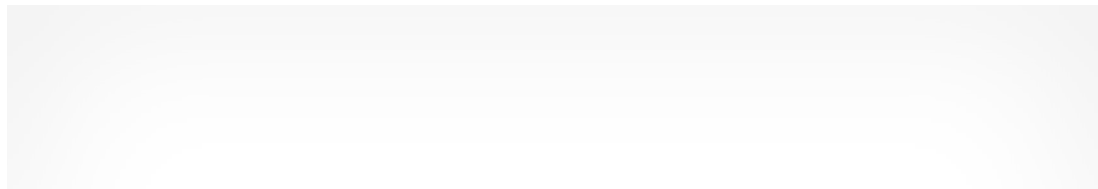
When reporters shared their findings, state motor vehicle officials from Florida to California rushed to take action.

And in Washington, D.C., the city's Department of Motor Vehicles realized only after repeated Globe inquiries that it had failed to notify states about drivers from those localities convicted of driving offenses in the nation's capital. In 2019 alone, there were 569 convictions of drivers licensed outside of D.C.

The agency acknowledged in a statement that it had no idea how long it had failed to send those alerts: “The questions we received from the Boston Globe earlier this year brought this matter to our attention. As a result, we took immediate steps to resolve the issue.”

ADVERTISING





The agency should have known better. In 2000, a damning [report](#) by the district's inspector general uncovered a backlog of about 15,000 unprocessed license suspensions. The audit cited a pair of fatal crashes in the late 1990s that may have been prevented had D.C. DMV acted properly in suspending two drivers.

The frequency of failure by state agencies to pull troubled drivers from the road is difficult to measure. Across the country, motor vehicle officials have the information to find out at their fingertips, but driver histories are often restricted, if not entirely off limits, to the public. The Globe had to cross-reference several databases and largely focused on drivers from the few states with relatively transparent public records laws.

[Read the Globe investigation “Blind Spot.”](#)

Take Florida. And consider just 2017.

The Globe identified 27 Florida residents who had been charged and convicted of serious traffic violations in Massachusetts, based on a review of records here. Reporters shared their findings with Florida officials. Within days, the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles revoked the licenses of 20 drivers. Two others had violations added to their records.

Among the Florida cases were:

- John C. Clefstad, 57, was found guilty in November 2017 in Bourne of operating without a license, reckless driving, and DUI (his third offense). Following Globe e-mails, Florida uncovered a series of other convictions. Officials found a 1994 DUI in New Hampshire, and two DUIs in New York in 1986. Clefstad had had an absolutely clean record — as far as Florida could tell. Now, his license is permanently revoked.

- Until the Globe called, Florida officials didn't know Michael J. Sullivan, 38, had a 2006 DUI in Missouri, a 2015 DUI in Massachusetts, or a 2018 DUI in Massachusetts — his fourth offense, according to records. Florida revoked his license.

- Duane C. Boone, 54, was convicted of driving under the influence in November 2017 in Nantucket. He had 33 previous Florida violations dating back to 2001 – two other DUIs, as well as convictions for speeding, driving on a suspended license, and more. But Florida had no idea about his Massachusetts conviction. Florida revoked his license days after the Globe contacted the state.

Boone said in an interview that he struggled for years with alcoholism and repeatedly “slipped up” and got behind the wheel. “I was wrong,” he said, and lucky he didn't injure anyone.

State agencies should “talk to each other” and better communicate information about violations, he added. “Someone could go out and kill somebody.”

A spokesperson for Florida's licensing agency laid blame on other states for failing to send timely alerts about offenders.

The Globe's investigation also prompted a review inside New Mexico's court system.

A reporter contacted authorities in mid-November to advise them of Kyle Kent Mawhorter's past convictions. Licensed in Nevada, Mawhorter, 32, led New Mexico police in 2016 on a high-speed chase, crashed a stolen pickup truck, and killed a 27-year-old woman.

New Mexico court spokeswoman Beth Wojahn acknowledged that her state's courts had never notified New Mexico's motor vehicle agency, which thus never notified Nevada. "We thank you for bringing this to our attention," she said in an e-mail.

Even so — and despite having 10 weeks to correct Mawhorter's record — his file remained untouched. Mawhorter left prison in late January and obtained a New Mexico identification card. He told the Globe that state officials said he could obtain a new license, but he chose not to because of financial concerns.

Mawhorter said he was surprised. He figured past violations would have prevented him from getting a license.

"That's insane," he said upon learning how the states failed to communicate about his case. "How do they not know what they are doing?"

After repeated Globe inquiries, the state agencies sorted out the matter weeks later and suspended Mawhorter's license in late February.

New Mexico court officials then launched a statewide review of this and other felony cases, including more than 100 convictions of reckless driving that killed or severely injured people. That review found widespread problems. The state's court system is now developing new statewide procedures.

“It’s not that hard for states to communicate,” Mawhorter said. “I still want the system to work because I have kids and I have family I care about.”

[Read the Globe investigation “Blind Spot.”](#)

Matt Rocheleau can be reached at matthew.rocheleau@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](https://twitter.com/mrochele).

 [Show 10 comments](#)

©2020 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC