

UNION BASHES FIRM FOR NAMING EMPLOYEES IN RMV AUDIT

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, AUG. 19, 2019.....As questions continue to swirl over who knew what and when about persistent record-keeping failures at the Registry of Motor Vehicles, the union representing two RMV employees slammed a national audit firm for naming them in a summary of its investigation.

Grant Thornton, the auditors tapped by the state to conduct an independent review, wrote in an [interim report](#) released by MassDOT on Friday that employee Michael Noronha viewed an alert that should have triggered a license suspension for a man who later caused a fatal New Hampshire crash but did not act on it. Auditors also said his supervisor in the SPEX department, Susan Crispin, failed to ensure her department was clearing a backlog of such notices as she awaited response from a software vendor about her concerns with the system.

The National Association of Government Employees called the auditors' decision to identify Noronha -- who told investigators he was not trained to act on the specific kind of alert involved -- and Crispin by name "mind boggling and truly unconscionable" in a Monday press release.

The union, which altogether represents almost 800 RMV workers, argued that the blame should instead lie with the Baker administration for insufficient public safety oversight and poor management.

"These two fine, hardworking individuals have been dragged into a set of circumstances that were no making of their own; a situation that has led to the death of seven people, and the shattering of scores of families," the union wrote in its press release. "A new department had been created at the Registry, but no one trained the staff in the unit before assigning them to other duties."

The Grant Thornton report offered a detailed look at the SPEX unit's involvement in the breakdown that allowed West Springfield's Volodymyr Zhukovskyy to keep his license, despite electronic and written notices that he had been arrested on OUI charges and refused a chemical test in Connecticut -- something that should have resulted in an automatic suspension.

On the day the digital alert from Connecticut was sent, Noronha viewed Zhukovskyy's file for seven seconds, but closed out of the window without acting and then did not tell anyone else in the department, auditors found.

Less than a month later, Zhukovskyy allegedly caused a crash in New Hampshire that killed seven motorcyclists, prompting then-Registrar Erin Deveney to resign and setting off a series of revelations about how the RMV had left thousands of similar warnings unaddressed.

Both Gov. Charlie Baker and Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack [have said](#) that they only learned about the RMV's shortcomings in the wake of the June 21 crash.

But NAGE National President David Holway called that account into question Monday, urging auditors to investigate how leaders at the RMV, including Deveney, knew about the breakdown without word reaching higher-ups.

"This whole situation reminds me of the TV series Hogan's Heroes with both Governor Baker and DOT Secretary Polack (sic) playing the part of Sargent Schultz, who famously continued to say, 'I know nothing!'" Holway said in the release. "The real question is, how could it be possible that they both knew 'nothing?'"

Lawmakers conducting their own inquiry have also hinted at doubts about the administration's claims.

House Speaker Robert DeLeo [said](#) last month that he believes "there are a whole lot of questions" about how far up the leadership chain awareness of the problem went, while Rep. William Straus, co-chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation leading the legislative investigation, said he is "skeptical" that the issues were known only within the RMV.

Asked for response to the union's allegations, Baker communications director Lizzy Guyton reiterated Monday the origins of Grant Thornton's audit, which is expected to produce a final report in September.

"Governor Baker directed Secretary Pollack to commission this outside forensic review to get to the bottom of the issues plaguing the RMV regarding out of state notifications, and to recommend remedial actions to fix what is broken and enhance public safety," Guyton said in a statement. "This initial report will be expanded upon in the next month and the administration looks forward to the final review to help identify more accountability and system wide improvements. MassDOT will continue to work with the Joint Committee to support their ongoing investigation."

A MassDOT spokesman, also asked for comment replying to NAGE, referred to a cover letter that Acting Registrar Jamey Tesler sent with release of Grant Thornton's report on Friday summarizing the audit's findings.

The RMV has suspended licenses of more than 2,400 drivers based on violation notices from other states since the scandal emerged.

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