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LICENSE AUDIT LEAVES BAKER, BUMP IN STRONG DISAGREEMENT [+VIDEO]

By Chris Triunfo

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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, SEPT. 7, 2018....Gov. Charlie Baker on Friday reiterated his disagreement with state audit findings released this week that claimed the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) issued licenses to nearly 2,000 people who were already deceased.

"The information we have from the RMV is that all of those people the auditor alleged are dead, are alive. It's as simple as that," Baker told reporters.

Baker initially pushed back against the audit on Thursday after announcing his plan to file legislation that would make it easier for police and the courts to detain defendants deemed a risk to their communities.

The RMV has supported the governor's statements, saying that they verified the living status of those who were named in state auditor Suzanne Bump's report.

"The Registry of Motor Vehicles rejects the findings in the Auditor's report, especially the false claim that the RMV is issuing licenses to 1900 deceased individuals who the RMV has verified are alive," the RMV said in a statement. "Of the 1,905 names provided by the Auditor, the RMV has confirmed that all 1,905 are alive."

Bump on Thursday said the audit exposed "the failure to prevent individuals from obtaining identification under the names of deceased people."

When asked if those who they claim are alive were assigned their licenses legally or if fraud was committed in their names, a Massachusetts Department of Transportation spokeswoman said the licenses were properly issued to living people.

Bump's office says that it stands by its findings.

"Our initial testing showed 36 licenses issued in the name of deceased individuals, the RMV agreed with this and referred these instances to the State Police. We used the same process to identify the 1,905 licenses and to identify over 10,000 disability parking placards that were issued in the name of deceased individuals," Michael Wessler, a spokesperson for Bump, said after the Baker administration questioned Bump's audit.

The audit, which looked at the agency between July 1, 2014 and Dec. 31, 2016, and which the RMV calls "outdated," found the agency issued licenses to people after their dates of death in the Social Security Administration's Death Master File. It also claims that the RMV did not correctly handle its distribution of disability parking placards, creating "a higher-than-acceptable risk that these placards may be abused and deprive people with disabilities of needed parking."



SHNS Video: Baker: Everybody on RMV audit list is alive

Bump, a Democrat who like Baker is up for re-election in November, has been making the rounds campaigning for various Democrats, including gubernatorial nominee Jay Gonzalez. On Wednesday, she emceed a post-primary Democratic unity event for the state Democratic Party. Bump's office said the release of the audit did not have any political motive, and that audits are released as they are ready, without consideration of elections.

In a 2013 audit of the Department of Transitional Assistance, Bump's office found that the agency paid over \$2 million in benefits to deceased people. This audit was also called into question at the time.

Gov. Deval Patrick, who served for eight years before Baker, went on WSHM-TV in Springfield in 2013 and said it was "infuriating" that benefits would be paid to anyone who was not entitled to receive them. "But the other thing is that this audit report is of questionable accuracy. We were given only 178 of the cases on which it relies, and nine out of 10 of the conclusions were wrong in those cases," the governor said.

A Massachusetts Law Reform Institute official on Friday described the 2013 audit as "woefully inaccurate" Bump, who served in Patrick's Cabinet as secretary of labor before being elected auditor, said then that the findings reflected the circumstances at the time of the audit.

This week's audit also found that the RMV "does not properly administer the return and destruction of placards belonging to deceased individuals. Rather than requiring placards to be returned to RMV for destruction, it allows the placard holders' estates to destroy or discard canceled placards themselves."

It said that this practice would open the door to the abuse of fraudulent handicapped parking. The audit recommended that the RMV require all individuals with permanent disability placards to reapply every five years. But the RMV said it does not do that because "it would be a burden for someone with a permanent disability to have to reapply."

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