

DMV Crowding, Security Woes Cited in Va. License Fraud Scheme

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Body

A massive **fraud scheme** to issue hundreds of illegal driver's **licenses** from the Baileys Crossroads motor vehicle office resulted in part from inadequate **security** and **crowding**, according to **Virginia** transportation officials.

Transportation Secretary John G. Milliken, calling for a closer review of immigrant identification documents and a greater reliance on the mail for routine Department of Motor Vehicle transactions, said the **fraud** has highlighted the dangers of the confusion that plagues many of the state's busy **DMV** branches.

"One of the reasons we get into that kind of problem is that those offices are **crowded**, chaotic. Those employees are pressed with lots of people demanding their attention at the same time," said Milliken, adding that the strain is worsened by "the increasingly diverse pool" of driver's **license** applicants.

A federal investigation targeting the Baileys Crossroads branch of the **DMV** became public in February 1989, when a team of state and federal agents arrested the owner of a local driving school and a **DMV** employee. Issam H. Abu-Ghosh, owner of A&G Driving School, later admitted that he charged immigrants up to \$ 450 for the **licenses** and used part of the money to pay off **DMV** employees to process them.

Federal investigators said illegal immigrants often used the **licenses** to illegally obtain work and residency permits.

Gail Yvette Shaw, the **DMV** employee, was sentenced yesterday to three months in prison and another three months in a halfway house for taking bribes from Abu-Ghosh and issuing driver's **licenses** without giving applicants a road or written test. Abu-Ghosh will be sentenced next month.

During the last two years, three former **DMV** clerks and owners of three driving schools have been prosecuted as a result of the investigation, but federal officials said other school owners and former **DMV** employees who may have participated in related scams have been identified.

DMV Commissioner Donald E. Williams, noting that several **security** changes have been made in recent months at Baileys Crossroad, said his office is reviewing the records of more than 2,000 people who received **licenses** through driving schools around the facility. He said it has not yet been determined which **licenses** were obtained illegally, but said the **DMV** "may call these people back in for retesting."

The Washington area's growing immigrant population has created a market for large-scale **fraud schemes** aimed at providing documents that immigrants need to find jobs or become permanent residents, federal officials say.

Duke Austin, a spokesman for the Immigration and Naturalization Service, said conspiracies such as the one at Baileys Crossroads have undermined the effectiveness of federal legislation passed in 1986 that penalizes employers if they are caught hiring immigrants without work permits and other valid identification. Once the

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government required the documents, Austin said, several underground networks were quickly established to supply them.

In response to the **fraud scheme** at Baileys Crossroads, **DMV** officials said they have shored up their **security**.

Daniel W. Byers, assistant administrator for field operations, said the agency has renewed efforts to train employees how to identify fraudulent Social **Security** cards, state ID cards, passports and other documents. The **DMV** also has issued a revised list of identification documents that it will accept from immigrants seeking **licenses** and increased its effort to rotate employees so that no one person can issue the eye, road and written tests to an applicant.

Although an additional **security** officer has been assigned at the Baileys Crossroads branch, officials said employees are still pressed by a crush of applicants, requiring even senior managers to pitch in at the information table or to administer tests. The branch's 39 employees process more than 200,000 transactions and issue about 20,000 driver's **licenses** each year.

Jake Simms, director of the Baileys Crossroads branch, said one of the most effective changes so far is a computer-generated written test. A computer randomly selects 20 questions so that each test is different.

"It used to be sometimes people would sit down and finish the test in 20 seconds. We had people who couldn't read English score 100 percent," Simms said.

Since April 3, when the branch switched over to the computer-generated tests, fewer applicants have come to Baileys Crossroads and the failure rate has jumped from 15 percent to 53 percent, Simms said.

But the bottom line, said Simms and other **DMV** officials, is that an immigrant with counterfeit documents still can beat the system and that some driving school instructors continue to take advantage of newly arrived immigrants.

Simms, pointing out cars from seven schools parked in the lot around the Baileys Crossroads office, said he recently received a call from a woman who was charged \$ 60 by a driving school instructor to help her cheat on a test. "That instructor is still walking around out here today," Simms said.

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