



Hundreds of licensed Missouri drivers receive blind benefits

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JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — Hundreds of people with active Missouri driver's licenses are collecting from a pension fund set up for blind residents, Gov. Eric Greitens said Friday in alleging widespread abuse of the system.

An investigation by the Department of Social Services and the Department of Revenue had flagged 436 people using the fund who also had driver's licenses, Greitens said in a statement. The Department of Social Services is now investigating at least 100 of those cases, including one person with a commercial driver's license and another who was charged with driving while intoxicated.

The investigation also found that some people had successfully renewed their driver's licenses while receiving benefits. License renewal requires better vision than is allowed for the fund.

"People who are abusing this system aren't just stealing from taxpayers, they're stealing from the most vulnerable," Greitens said in the statement.

The fund was established almost a century ago. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported earlier this month that about 2,900 people participated in the program, which provides monthly payments of more than \$700 as well as Medicaid benefits.

The statement did not say when the investigation began. The governor's office did not return requests for comment, and representatives for the governor and the Department of Social Services did not immediately respond to requests to see the full investigation.

The press release came a week before a Cole County judge is to consider a multi-million dollar settlement between Missouri and many blind residents.

Earlier this year, the state agreed to pay \$21 million to blind Missourians who said they hadn't received money they were owed through the state fund. The settlement stemmed from a lawsuit filed more than a decade ago by the Missouri Council of the Blind, who argued that the Family Support Division and the Department of Social Services had been underpaying blind residents.

A bill that would further restrict what blind residents can receive benefits was overwhelmingly approved by the House March 15. It is now under consideration in the Senate.