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Newsroom

Alumna to Lead DMV Shake-Up

Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Chafee taps RWU Law alumna Lisa Holley '01 to lead a shake-up of the state's moribund Department of Motor Vehicles.

From the Providence Journal: "[R.I. Governor Chafee: 'Fix the DMV'](#)" by Paul Davis, Journal Staff Writer.

CRANSTON, R.I., March 31, 2011 — Standing inside the Division of Motor Vehicles' new \$17-million headquarters, Governor Chafee on Wednesday became the latest governor to vow to fix the troubled agency, where harried customers wait for hours to get licenses and register their vehicles.

"Many have called this 'Mission: Impossible,' " said Chafee as he replaced the chief of the DMV and promised to improve service.

Rhode Islanders, he said, deserve better service for their tax dollars. "I know we can get these wait times down."



A new team will tackle the problems at the DMV, including interim Director **Lisa S. Holley [RWU Law '01]**, a former police detective and chief legal counsel for the state Department of Public Safety since 2008. She replaces Sara R. "Sally" Strachan, who resigned. Strachan earned \$107,157 a year.

Holley, who served on the state Parole Board for 13 years, 11 as its chairwoman, said she has a "proven leadership record" and promised to figure out why the agency isn't more effective.

"We plan to look at our neighbors and at other systems that run better," she said.

"We need to do a better job and we will do a better job," but it is too soon to tell if the agency needs to hire more workers, open more branches or do something else, she said.

A former Warwick Police detective, Holley is an adjunct faculty member in the Administration of Justice Department at Salve Regina University.

The DMV in recent years has come under fire for closing branches and trimming staff even as wait times have soared to four or more hours in some branches, forcing customers to miss work.

Rhode Islanders should not lose a day's pay just to do business at the DMV, Chafee said. "My goal is to make the DMV a model of exceptional customer service and my instructions are very simple: fix the DMV."

Former Democratic Lt. Gov. Richard A. Licht, Chafee's director of administration, will join Holley as part of the new team assigned to fix the department.

Rosemary Booth Gallogly, director of the state Department of Revenue, will also help.

During the news conference, Chafee noted that President John F. Kennedy sent a man to the moon in 1969. If Kennedy could do that, Rhode Island can certainly improve the DMV, he said.

Created by the General Assembly in 1904, the old Registry — first run by the Office of the Secretary of State — was housed in the State House. Later, it moved across the street, where motorists griped about long lines. By 1993, Department of Transportation Director Dante E. Boffi Jr. was calling it "a miserable building with a miserable parking situation."

Previous governors, from J. Joseph Garrahy to Donald Carcieri, have promised to fix the problem.

Under the Carcieri administration, the DMV moved its headquarters from the Apex Mall in Pawtucket last summer to a renovated state building in the Pastore Complex on Route 2.

But officials also closed three branches, including one in the Rhode Island Mall, with Saturday hours.

Fed up with long waits in one branch, West Greenwich customer Kathie St. Martin created a Facebook page called "Misery at the RI DMV," and invited others to vent.

The DMV has made some progress in the last few years, Gallogly said.

In addition to opening a new headquarters last August, the department recently installed new software to better track wait times, something done by hand in the past, she said.

The DMV has also expanded space in the Wakefield office, improved other branches and updated its website, she said.

And, this week, officials opened a new customer service desk on the second floor of the Cranston headquarters.

But Gallogly admitted that while some express-line transactions can take minutes, the average wait time for renewing or getting a license can take four hours or more.

As a result, some DMV workers, she said, have had to close branches early and stay late to finish their work.

And, after four years, the department has yet to get an \$11-million computer system up and running, Gallogly said.

The delay has been caused, in part, by a change in ownership of the company providing the service, she said.

It's also a daunting task to place all of the state's databases under a single operating system, she said.

"We are frustrated by the length of time it has taken, but we're not alone." Other states have had similar problems, she said.

In his speech at the DMV, Chafee noted that former Gov. Bruce Sundlun built a new terminal at T.F. Green Airport in two years.

"He did it through force of will," he said. "So it can be done. He woke up every morning thinking about that terminal," said Chafee, who promised to do the same for the DMV.

For full story, click [here](#).