

## Offenders

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reached out to the district or state education department to alert them.

The audit also faulted the State Patrol for not passing along conviction data from other states.

The auditors contacted the state Department of Corrections to find out if any of the offenders found through the audit were under state supervision while living in the child care or foster homes. Five were under supervision at the time, but none were suspected of breaking the law while living near children.

The auditors contacted the state education department before they completed the audit. Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn instituted some policy changes to fix the problem and added checks of classified employees to the work of the Office of the

child care providers did not inform the agencies that offenders lived there, the audit showed.

Of the 17 in child care homes, only two were Department of Early Learning licensed family home child cares. Since the audit, the department has revoked the licenses of one of them and the other went out of business, said department spokeswoman Amy Blondin.

Another 11 cases involved homes where foster kids were living, including one case where a former foster child returned home after committing some crimes. In several other cases, the sex offender and the care provider were related. The audit reported that DSHS reacted quickly, revoking foster care licenses and removing children from the homes.

The agency also changed its procedures to more regularly compare the addresses of registered sex offenders with the addresses of all the people who care for foster kids, as well as the elderly and people with developmental disabilities.

Sen. Mike Carrell, R-Lakewood, said he expected to propose a bill next year to more closely watch unlicensed day care homes for people who shouldn't be living or working near kids.

"We have our work cut out for us in the state of Washington," Carrell said.

He previously focused his lawmaking activities on social service fraud but this audit inspired him to look further.

"My approach for next year will be more comprehensive," Carrell said. "I need to look at other ways that kids may be taken advantage of."

DSHS and the Department of Early Learning are working together to improve the way they check applicants and monitor providers, the audit reported. The agencies also have developed procedures to flag provider files so they cannot slip back into the system without a careful check to see that they are obeying laws and procedures.

**'I'm glad we're talking about this as a gross bureaucratic oversight instead of an investigation afterward when a child had been molested'**

— Rep. Bruce Dammeier, R-Puyallup

Superintendent of Public Instruction personnel who investigate teachers and other certificated school workers.

Dammeier said he was glad the superintendent's staff took ownership of the problem and quickly worked to correct it.

"I'm glad we're talking about this as a gross bureaucratic oversight instead of an investigation afterward when a child had been molested," he added.

Of the 28 other sex offenders found through the audit, 17 lived in places where child care was provided and the rest were living in foster homes. In 24 of the cases, offenders lived there undetected because the

## Traffic

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Northeast 52nd Street have suggested he tell the city his is also a planter box, one where the seeds have yet to sprout.

"It just seems ridiculous and totally contrary to everything this city is about," said Nekole Shapiro, another neighbor. Aren't we trying to create community?"

On Friday, after conversations with Nunes-Ueno and a call from The Seattle Times, the Transportation Department said it would put together an internal task force, to include the city traffic engineer and the legal department, to examine the issue.

"Given that we have never permitted a sandbox in the right of way before and we have questions about how to do so safely, we are going to allow this one to temporarily remain as we consider whether a change is needed to allow this sort of use," said Rick Sheridan, spokesman for the department.

The city says current law doesn't permit play structures in the right of way and must allow access for people getting in and out of cars, said Barbara Gray, director of street use and urban forestry within the city Department of Transportation.

"The concern is safety when you put kids close to the travel lane," she said. Both the city and the homeowner could be legally liable if children were hurt because they were playing near the sandbox. The city also prohibits stand-alone basketball hoops because of the danger of kids running into

and actively playing in the street, and it has sent similar warning notices.

But Gray also notes that until 2008, the city didn't allow planter boxes on the planting strip. They are now allowed if the homeowner gets a free permit from the city and meets the requirement for public access and car-door clearance, she said.

She said there has been a debate among pedestrian advocates and urban planners

**'I told them this is a silly rule. We should be encouraging neighbors to get together and children to play outside'**

— Paulo Nunes-Ueno

about the benefits of "front-yard" activities and whether they help activate neighborhood streets and make them more people-friendly.

"We want to be both innovative and prudent when making these decisions," she said.

The Sightline Institute in Seattle, which advocates green public policy, sees the sandbox debate as an opening for the city to reconsider how it prioritizes street use, particularly away from major arterials.

Clark Williams-Derry, research director, points to Scandinavian countries where, on

some designated streets, pedestrians and cyclists have equal right to the street and cars can't go faster than walking speed.

He gives a local example, Pike Place, the brick road through the center of the Pike Place Market, where people wander and the cars move slowly to avoid them.

"When the cars don't own the road but are sharing the road, it's actually safer for pedestrians," he said. "The notion that the only

way to keep kids safe is to separate them from the street is contradicted by evidence," he said.

He agreed it would be a tragedy if a kid ran out into the street and were hit by a car, but he said not having a sandbox doesn't eliminate the risk.

City Councilmember Mike O'Brien, a former Sierra Club leader, said the city should try to balance creating more public spaces for kids to play with keeping them safe.

"The safest place for the sandbox is in the backyard, but then you lose out on all the

community building," O'Brien said. "Planting strips are an underutilized space. There's a public-safety benefit when people on a street know each other and look out for each other."

Several of Nunes-Ueno's neighbors said parents on the street frequently have talked about how to slow down traffic. Cars cut through from a busy nearby arterial, often going faster than seems safe, they said.

"The traffic circle doesn't really slow people. What are you going to tell the kids? Don't go out and play? They're all friends. They walk up and down the street to each other's houses," said the neighbor, Shapiro.

Nunes-Ueno got the news Friday that the city would allow the sandbox to stay in place while it studies whether some play structures can be safely permitted.

"I'm so excited. This is wonderful news," he said.

He said ceding all the streets to cars creates a vicious cycle: nobody is on the street, the cars use it like a speedway, and nobody goes out there because it isn't safe. He said he's inspired by some of the international thinking about how to create "outdoor rooms" that slow down traffic as well as provide more public space.

"We can have a conversation as a city about how to help create friendly gathering spaces in front of houses," Nunes-Ueno said.

## Grill Masters



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Derick Williams samples a burger before rating its quality as a judge at the annual UNCF Barbeque for Education Aug. 4 at Judkins Park. Participants competed for a BBQ grill and the title of UNCF Grill Master.