

Unreliable databases could cost even citizens their jobs

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IPC Senior Policy Analyst Michele Waslin wrote an article published in the Orlando Sentinel highlighting the problems with E-Verify:

Nearly everyone agrees that our immigration system is broken and in desperate need of reform. However, there is much disagreement over what to do about it. Some believe that making the E-Verify electronic employment-verification system mandatory for all employers would deter illegal immigration and open up jobs for unemployed Floridians.

Unfortunately, E-Verify is not the magic bullet some claim it to be. In fact, mandatory E-Verify could actually cause U.S. citizens and legal workers to lose their jobs and would hurt Florida's economy.

Under E-Verify, employers submit all new workers' information to Department of Homeland Security and Social Security databases and then receive either a confirmation that the worker is authorized to work in the U.S. or a tentative nonconfirmation, meaning that additional steps must be taken to determine the worker's status. At the end of the process, the worker either is confirmed as work-authorized, or receives a final nonconfirmation.

Even though improvements have been made in recent years, the E-Verify databases remain unreliable — meaning that a U.S. citizen could be inaccurately flagged as not authorized to work in the U.S. Legal immigrants, women who changed their names after marriage or divorce, and people with hyphenated names are more likely to get an error.

These people have to take time from work and navigate the government bureaucracy to fix the error or lose their jobs. Government sources estimate this could affect between 73,000 and 212,000 legal workers in Florida. The error rate for foreign-born workers is 20 times greater, meaning up to 57,000 legal workers could be told to fix their records or lose their jobs.

E-Verify isn't very good at identifying unauthorized workers either — the very thing it was created to do. A government-sanctioned evaluation of the program found that 54 percent of unauthorized workers got through by using false documents. In other words, more than half the illegal workers who went through the system were given the green light to work.

At a time when businesses need to grow and expand, E-Verify would place additional burdens on businesses — especially small businesses. Many don't have the money or personnel — or even a human-resources department — to meet the demands of E-Verify, and they can't handle the lost productivity experienced when they need to take time to work with legal employees to clear up errors. One study found that 49 percent of those workers took partial or complete days off work, made multiple trips to the Social Security Administration and waited in long lines to correct their records.

SSA has also been vocal in its concerns about implementing the program, as it has not been given additional resources to deal with the increased burden of thousands of workers trying to correct their records while also dealing with the 10,000 baby boomers who turn 65 every day.

Of course, employers who want to hire undocumented workers will go around E-Verify and hire workers under the table. This also means that taxes won't be withheld, depriving the state of much-needed revenue. Other employers have been found coaching unauthorized workers how to get around the system. Still other employers have misused the system, firing workers who get a tentative nonconfirmation, without giving them a chance to rectify the error.

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