

Milford and ICE are partners in work program

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MILFORD —

Selectmen last night decided unanimously the town will partner with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in a program that will help ensure all municipal employees are eligible to work in the United States.

The partnership would provide rapid verification of I-9 employment eligibility forms for all town employees with the intent of creating “an example” for the rest of the business community.

“This would essentially provide a much quicker information access to the evaluation of the I-9 forms we currently now undergo,” said Selectman Brian Murray.

Milford is the first Massachusetts community to join the program called Mutual Agreement between Government and Employers, better known as Image. Less than a dozen communities have joined the program created in 2006 nationwide.

The Image program is described by ICE as a joint initiative that provides businesses enhanced security, ensures companies maintain legal and compliant work forces and minimizes the likelihood of hiring illegal immigrants.

On June 19, Town Administrator Louis Celozzi and Police Chief Thomas O’Loughlin spoke with an ICE representative about the program, which prompted them both to make a recommendation to the selectmen.

Through the partnership, employee I-9 forms are put through a system called E-Verify. After only five to six seconds, the system can tell if the information on the form is accurate and if the employee is in fact a citizen.

“This would make an example for the rest of the businesses in the community if we move forward with this,” said Celozzi.

Neither Celozzi nor O’Laughlin believe that any town employee is working here illegally, but by adopting the program, local businesses will be encouraged to join.

The town has tried to crack down on illegal immigrants over the last few years. Public outcry came to an all-time high last year after 23-year-old Matthew Denice was killed by a man who police say was an intoxicated driver in the country illegally.

Board member Bill Buckley said, “Frankly I think this allows Milford to take a leadership role and I think that we are uniquely positioned to take that leadership role simply because we understand better than most communities what the secondary effects of what illegal immigration are.”

Buckley said illegal immigration has led to “human trafficking and a host of other things that go along with the secondary impact of hiring illegals.”

Board Chairman Dino DeBartolomeis said, “I think the things that the town of Milford has done is second to none in the commonwealth.”

E-Verify is a no-cost, Internet-based system that was created in partnership by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration.

Several lawmakers and advocacy groups such as the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition in the past have said that the system is unreliable and that errors have led legal immigrants to temporarily lose their jobs and benefits.

Special Agent Bruce M. Foucart, who is in charge of Homeland Security investigations in Boston, said in an earlier interview that if a potential employee is shown not to be eligible to work in the U.S. by E-Verify, but that person claims that information is inaccurate, ICE will “track down to ensure that we find out whether that person is in status or not.”

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