

ERROR! Electronic Employment Verification Systems: What Will Happen When Citizens Have To Ask The Government For Permission To Work?

by Michele Waslin of the Immigration Policy Center

Many on Capitol Hill are eyeing favorably bills that create a massive electronic employment database. While proponents of the Shuler-Tancredo "SAVE Act" (HR 4088) and the Johnson "New Employee Verification Act of 2008" (HR 5515) talk tough about cracking down on illegal immigrants, the truth is their bills' nationwide mandatory electronic employment verification system require all American workers, foreign- and native-born alike, to seek the government's permission to work. If the government database isn't accurate, Americans will be denied employment and paychecks, at least temporarily, while they attempt to resolve the problem with the government agencies.

The proposed bills build upon the E-Verify program, a small pilot program that taps Social Security Administration (SSA) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) databases to make determinations about employment authorization. Here is what we know about the databases and what we can expect if these bills are passed:

Errors in the database that E-Verify checks to determine work authorization status impact millions.

4.1%: error rate in the SSA database

17.8 million: number of discrepancies in the SSA database

12.7 million: number of database discrepancies pertaining to native-born U.S. citizens

1 in 25: number of new hires that would receive a tentative nonconfirmation based on error rates

55 million: approximate number of new hires per year in the U.S.

11,000: number of workers per day who would be flagged as ineligible for employment if E-Verify were mandatory for all employers

25: workers per work day per congressional district who would be flagged as ineligible for employment if the Shuler or Johnson bill passed, making E-Verify mandatory for all employers

If the Shuler or Johnson bills are passed, E-Verify would have to be expanded exponentially in a short time period.

55,000: the number of employers currently enrolled in E-Verify

7 million: the approximate number of employers in the U.S.

13,000%: approximate increase from number of current users

6,500: approximate number of employers per day (including weekends and holidays) that would have to enroll in E-Verify to meet the Johnson bill requirement of enrollment of all employers within 3 years. 4,800 per day to meet the Shuler bill 4-year requirements.

50-60 million: number of queries per year E-Verify would have to respond to if the Johnson or Shuler bill were enacted

3.6 million: number of queries E-Verify received in 2007

Impact on the Social Security Administration if E-Verify were made mandatory for all employers

751,676: number of cases waiting for decisions on disability claims today

499: average number of days a person waits for a disability claim decision today
50%: percentage of calls to SSA field offices that receive a busy signal today
78 million: number of baby boomers soon to be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits
1 million: increase in the number of claims submitted to SSA per year for the next ten years due to the retirement of baby boomers
3.6 million: number of extra visits or calls to SSA field offices if the "SAVE Act" or the "New Employee Verification Act" were to make E-Verify mandatory
2,000-3,000: number of work years SSA would need to address increases in demand
Employers in the voluntary pilot program misuse E-Verify. A 2007 evaluation of E-Verify commissioned by DHS found that:
47%: employers who improperly put workers through E-Verify before the employees' first day of work.
22%: employers who restricted work assignments based on tentative nonconfirmations
16%: employers who delayed job training based on tentative non-confirmations

Sources:

Harper, Jim. "Electronic Employment Eligibility Verification: Franz Kafka's Solution to Illegal Immigration." Washington, DC: CATO Institute, March 5, 2008.

<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa-612.pdf>

Office of the Inspector General, Social Security Administration, "Accuracy of the Social Security Administration's Numident File," Congressional Response Report A-08-06-26100, December 2006, <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/oig/ADOBEPDF/auditxt/A-08-06-26100.htm>

Westat, "Interim Findings of the Web-Based Basic Pilot Evaluation," Report submitted to U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Washington, DC, December 2006, p.III-15, <http://www.uscis.gov/files/nativedocuments/WestatInterimReport.pdf>

O'Carroll, Jr., Patrick. Reducing the Disability Backlog at the Social Security Administration. Testimony before the U.S. House Appropriations Committee, subcommittee on labor, health, and human services, and education and related agencies February 28, 2008.

http://www.ssa.gov/oig/communications/testimony_speeches/02282008testimony.htm

Warsinskey, Richard. Testimony before the U.S. House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, and Education and Related Agencies (National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc., Feb 8, 2008), <http://socsecperspectives.blogspot.com/2008/02/social-security-advocacy-group-written.html>.

Copyright: The material above was originally produced by the Immigration Policy Center of the American Immigration Law Foundation. Reproduced with Permission.

About The Author

Michele Waslin, Ph.D., is Senior Research Analyst at the Immigration Policy Center. She has authored several publications on immigration policy and post-9/11 immigrant issues and appears regularly in English and Spanish-language media.
