

E-Verify and the Social Security Administration: A Rocky Road Ahead for U.S. Seniors

Many who support deportation-only immigration measures want to expand the E-Verify electronic employment verification system. However, doing so would place enormous additional responsibilities on the Social Security Administration (SSA)—an already overburdened agency. If SSA has to spend time and resources verifying Social Security numbers and fixing database errors for work authorization purposes, SSA will have less time and resources to handle its primary function: providing benefits to millions of deserving Americans. That's why the AARP, the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, and other organizations have voiced their concerns over mandatory E-Verify. In 2007, the president of the National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc. testified that mandatory E-Verify could "cripple SSA's service capabilities" and negate any progress in addressing the backlog of applications for disability benefits.

SSA's ability to do its job is critical to millions of Americans.

- Each month, nearly 60 million Americans receive benefits from SSA.
- In Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, SSA served 45.4 million field office visitors, completed over 67 million phone transactions, conducted 325,000 full medical continuing disability reviews, completed 2.5 million Supplemental Security Income (SSI) non-disability redeterminations, completed 738,000 hearings, and much more.
- In the Waterloo, Iowa office alone, SSA receives about 480 visitors a week and 150 phone calls each day. The Waterloo office covers 4,000 square miles—encompassing 50,000 retired and disabled workers and their families, survivors of deceased workers, and more than 4,500 SSI recipients.

SSA is already overburdened.

- Currently, 30 percent of SSA's cases wait more than 270 days. As of February 2011, SSA had 774,000 pending initial disability cases.
- The number of disability applications has increased in recent years. In FY 2010, SSA received nearly 100,000 more hearing requests than in FY 2009. In one month alone, SSA received 82,000 hearing requests.
- Due to funding shortages, SSA discontinued service in over 300 remote service sites throughout the U.S. and may have to consolidate field offices. SSA has had to suspend the mailing of annual earnings and benefits statements to taxpayers.

Baby boomers are already increasing SSA's workload.

- Nearly 80 million baby boomers will soon be eligible for Social Security retirement benefits. Every day for the next 19 years, 10,000 baby boomers will turn 65.

Expansion of E-Verify will put an enormous burden on SSA.

- Currently, only 250,000 of the nation's 7.4 million employers have registered for E-Verify—or 3 percent. A mandatory system would mean millions of employers registering, and millions of additional queries running through the system.
- If E-Verify were made mandatory for new hires, SSA would have to process 50-60 million new queries per year, in addition to the rest of their workload. In 2007, SSA testified that if E-Verify were mandatory, 3.6 million citizens and lawful immigrants would have to go to an SSA office to fix their records or lose their jobs.
- SSA's database has a 4.1 percent error rate amounting to 17.8 million discrepancies; 12.7 million of those discrepancies pertain to native-born U.S. citizens. For example, workers who naturalize, marry, divorce, or have multiple or hyphenated surnames may receive erroneous results from E-Verify. One in 25 new hires could receive an erroneous response from E-Verify due to SSA errors and would have to go to an SSA field office to correct the error.
- An independent evaluation of E-Verify found that approximately 0.8 percent of all E-Verify queries resulted in an erroneous "tentative nonconfirmation" (TNC) notice, which means the databases cannot immediately confirm that the worker is employment-authorized. This means that, for every one million workers queried, 8,000 work-authorized people are told they're not authorized to work.

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