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E-VERIFY ADVANCES IN HOUSE, POSING RISKS FOR U.S. WORKERS, BUSINESSES & ECONOMY

Statement of Christine Owens, Executive Director, National Employment Law Project:

In a regrettable vote of 22 to 13, the House Judiciary Committee yesterday approved a bill sponsored by Representative Lamar Smith that would mandate that all U.S. employers begin using an online database, known as E-Verify, to check the immigration status of workers in order to confirm they are authorized to work in the United States.

A national mandate on businesses to use E-verify would subject the country to a host of economic and civil rights hazards, and it would fail to resolve the status of the undocumented workforce.

As the federal government has acknowledged, the E-Verify database is full of flaws. Studies have reported a range of error rates, and even conservative estimates show that up to 1.3 million employees annually could be wrongfully told that they are ineligible to work. Any new hire in America who is ensnared by E-Verify's flaws – not just immigrants – would have only a few days to try to correct the error, or risk losing a job.

In economic terms, businesses share a legitimate concern that E-Verify would impose new bureaucratic burdens and raise the cost of doing business. Taxpayers would lose out too: E-Verify could very likely embolden bottom-feeder employers to hire more workers off the books and abuse our payroll tax and insurance systems. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office estimates that nationwide implementation of E-Verify would decrease federal tax revenues by $17.3 billion over ten years due to an increase in off-the-book workers.

The country's immigration crisis demands comprehensive reform to our immigration system and strengthened labor standards to protect all of our nation's workers. Mandating immigration database checks is merely a way to pull the wool over our eyes. Congress should reject E-Verify.

The National Employment Law Project is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts research and advocates on issues affecting low-wage and unemployed workers. For more about NELP, visit www.nelp.org.