



Pennsylvania Poised to Expand E-Verify Requirements for Construction

Scott Braddock

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After it was passed by the legislature, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf must decide whether to veto or sign a bill into law that would expand the requirements for the E-Verify system to check the legal status of all construction workers.

The governor has publicly said only that he would review it once it is on his desk. But a Republican state senator has said the governor told him that he would approve it.

If that happens and it becomes law, the measure would require all construction firms to put their new hires' information through the federal background check system. If a company is found to have hired undocumented workers, the company must fire those employees and send reports on new hires to the state Department of Labor & Industry.

Desi Burnette with a group called the Movement of Immigrant Leaders in Pennsylvania said the bill is "very shortsighted and wrong," adding that it will "hurt working families in every district across this state."

"It's disappointing so many people who claim to represent workers in our state would support this anti-immigrant legislation that further divides and weakens the voice of working families in Pennsylvania," Burnette told the Pennsylvania Capital-Star.

The newspaper also pointed to the work of Alex Nowrasteh at the libertarian Cato Institute, who has argued E-Verify is deeply flawed and is certainly not the kind of "silver bullet" that some make it out to be.

"E-Verify is not a gift from heaven, it was created by the federal government and funded by taxpayers. E-Verify is also not free because of the opportunity cost of using the system," Nowrasteh wrote. "The current I-9 form costs employers an estimated 13.48 million man-hours each year. A national E-Verify mandate would add to that – perhaps substantially. Those are a lot of hours that employers could otherwise spend on growing their businesses but instead must waste complying with government rules."

"Second, E-Verify is ineffective at detecting illegal immigrant workers. On top of that, E-Verify's accuracy rates are notoriously difficult to judge," Nowrasteh said. "An audit of the system by the firm Westat found that an estimated 54 percent of unauthorized workers were

incorrectly found to be work authorized by E-Verify because of rampant document fraud. E-Verify relies upon the documents presented by the workers themselves to their employer. Frequently, identity information comes from deceased Americans – a loophole the government seems incapable of closing."