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The unauthorized immigrant accused of murdering Mollie Tibbetts used a stolen ID to get a job, his manager says

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- The suspect in 20-year-old Mollie Tibbetts' murder used fake identification documents to work at an Iowa farm for years, despite being an unauthorized immigrant.
- The manager at Yarrabee Farms said 24-year-old Cristhian Rivera was a good employee, but was "not who he said he was."
- Rivera's arrest prompted a roiling debate over illegal immigration and border security, but experts cautioned that Rivera is an outlier — unauthorized immigrants commit fewer crimes and homicides than native-born Americans.

The man accused of murdering 20-year-old Mollie Tibbetts used false identification to pass the Social Security Administration's employment verification system, his former employer said Wednesday.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials announced Tuesday that 24-year-old Cristhian Bahena Rivera is a Mexican national who lived illegally in the Iowa area for up to seven years.

Rivera has been charged with first-degree murder, and was arraigned in the Poweshiek County Courthouse Wednesday afternoon.

Authorities said Rivera admitted to following Tibbetts on July 18 while she was out for a jog, approaching her, and then blacking out and later discovering her body in the trunk of his car.

Rivera's employer, Yarrabee Farms, initially said Rivera had passed the government's E-Verify system, which is designed to flag unauthorized immigrants for employers. But manager Dane Lang told the Associated Press on Wednesday that they were mistaken, and had not used E-Verify.

Lang said Rivera was a good employee who worked for the company for four years.

"Our employee is not who he said he was," Lang said.

'A public policy cannot be based on terrible individual stories'

Rivera's lawyer, Allen Richards, argued in court documents on Wednesday that Rivera is in the US legally, though he didn't explain what type of work authorization Rivera had.

"Sad and Sorry Trump has weighed in on this matter in national media which will poison the entire possible pool of jury members," Richards said in a motion requesting a gag order.

Richards didn't immediately respond to Business Insider's requests for comment on Rivera's alleged false identification documents.

Rivera's immigration status quickly became a national controversy on Tuesday, even prompting President Donald Trump to call current US immigration law "a disgrace" during a rally.

The White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, weighed in on Tibbetts' death as well, calling the case "an unfortunate reminder of why we need to strengthen our immigration laws."

But immigration experts have urged caution in cracking down on illegal immigration and vilifying millions of unauthorized immigrants based on the alleged actions of outliers like Rivera.

Studies have shown that unauthorized immigrants are less likely to commit crimes— including homicides — than native-born Americans.

"A public policy cannot be based on terrible individual stories like these. We need to take a look at the big picture," Alex Nowrasteh, a senior immigration policy analyst at the libertarian Cato Institute, told Business Insider.

"If we spend all these law-enforcement resources on identifying and deporting people who are less crime-prone than other people, then that means that there are less police resources to try to enforce real crime," he added. "And the likely result is that more people will get killed."