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DeSantis should avoid flawed E-Verify ID system

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Gov. Ron DeSantis, like his predecessor Rick Scott, said he supports mandatory E-Verify in Florida to prevent the hiring of illegal immigrants. (Amy Beth Bennett / South Florida Sun Sentinel)

Gov. Ron DeSantis and other members of the Florida GOP are mulling whether to enact mandatory E-Verify for all new hires. DeSantis, like his predecessor Rick Scott, said he supports mandatory E-Verify in Florida to prevent the hiring of illegal immigrants, but other Republicans like Sen. Joe Gruters, who doubles as chairman of the local Republican Party, **said** he "wants to hear what people have to say" first. Here's what the facts say: E-Verify doesn't work. Florida shouldn't mandate it.

E-Verify is a federal government system whereby businesses check the identities of workers to guarantee that they are legally eligible to work. States have been experimenting with E-Verify as an immigration enforcement tool for more than a decade. Alabama, Arizona, Mississippi, and South Carolina mandated the system, meaning that employers must take the identity information of all new hires, run them through E-Verify, and wait for government permission to keep them on the payroll. DeSantis' proposal would copy those states.

Arizona was the first to mandate E-Verify for all new hires beginning on January 1, 2008. **Rich Crandall**, a Republican former state Senator from Mesa, Ariz., said that E-Verify "was promised as the silver bullet to immigration problems. E-Verify was going to solve our challenges with immigration."

Far from a silver bullet, E-Verify is shooting blanks.

The Mississippi raids in early August are a case in point. In one day, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested 680 illegal immigrants who were working at poultry processing plants operated by five different companies in Mississippi. Their employment was supposed to be impossible after the state mandated E-Verify on July 1, 2011.

But E-Verify's failure in Mississippi is even worse than it appears. Mississippi had been enrolled in the Records and Information from DMVs for E-Verify (**RIDE**) initiative since 2011. RIDE checks drivers license information against information held by the state's DMV. Even with an E-Verify mandate and enrollment in the RIDE initiative, Mississippi employers still hired hundreds of illegal immigrants.

This lapse happened because E-Verify has numerous fatal flaws.

The first fatal flaw is that E-Verify doesn't check the immigration status of workers, it only checks the paperwork that workers hand to their employers. If illegal immigrants steal identities or borrow them from their legal friends and relatives and E-Verify approves the paperwork, the illegal immigrant can start working and the government is none the wiser.

The second fatal flaw with E-Verify is that many businesses don't even use it despite the mandates. According to the most recent data available, only **about half** of all new hires in Mississippi were run through E-Verify in 2017, even though the law mandated 100 percent compliance. Mississippi has the lowest compliance rate of any state with an E-Verify mandate, but not by much. Arizona has a "business death penalty" for employers who routinely hire illegal workers, but its compliance rate is only about **60 percent**. And only three businesses have been "executed" in Arizona for knowingly or intentionally hiring illegal immigrants on more than one occasion, and two of them were already bankrupt.

Does anyone really think that the Florida government will go as far as to target businesses and shut down those that don't use E-Verify?

In addition to not working, E-Verify will just add another layer of bureaucracy onto Florida businesses and workers, and the program is largely opposed by business leaders across sectors in the state. Politico's Florida Playbook **reported** on a **letter** from the American Business Immigration Coalition (ABIC) and the Immigration Partnership and Coalition (IMPAC) Fund signed by dozens of business leaders and former elected officials opposing mandatory E-Verify.

If Gov. DeSantis and other Republicans want to add another regulation on top of every other regulatory and tax burden carried by Florida businesses and workers, it should at least be effective. Since E-Verify does not even accomplish its primary goals, Florida should not mandate it.

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