



DeSantis urges Florida lawmakers to adopt 2020 E-Verify bill

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Gov. Ron DeSantis is calling on state lawmakers to adopt a 2020 bill mandating employers use the federal E-Verify system to validate workers' immigration status, saying implementation would make Floridians safer from crimes committed by criminals among undocumented immigrants.

"Today, I am calling on the Florida Legislature to pass and send to my desk common sense E-Verify legislation to ensure a safe and legal labor market in Florida," DeSantis said during a Monday press conference in The Villages.

E-Verify, an electronic federal database created in 1996 and maintained by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Department of Homeland Security, is used by more than 700,000 employers and 2.4 million hiring sites nationwide, according to the SSA.

The system is required to varying degrees in 20 states, with South Carolina, Arizona and Mississippi adopting mandatory E-Verify bills in the last two years.

"The reason this is so timely is twofold – it's about fairness for lawful immigrants and native-born workers, and it's about public safety," DeSantis said. "I trust the Legislature will act swiftly in the 2020 Legislative Session and pass an E-Verify requirement for employers in this state to protect Florida workers, preserve the rule of law, and make our communities safer."

The governor was accompanied by parents of two Floridians murdered by illegal immigrants, the mother of a woman killed in a traffic accident caused by an undocumented immigrant, state GOP Chairman Sen. Joe Gruters, R-Sarasota, and Rep. Cord Byrd, R-Jacksonville.

"The reason this is so timely is two-fold," DeSantis said Monday during a press conference in The Villages. "It's about fairness for lawful immigrants and native-born workers, and it's about public safety."

Gruters and Sen. Tom Lee, R-Thonotosassa, are co-sponsoring Senate Bill 664, which would require all state employers to use E-Verify. Similar bills have failed two of the last three legislative sessions.

SB 664, filed Oct. 24, has been assigned to the Judiciary, Commerce & Tourism and Rules committees and awaits a first hearing. That likely won't happen until the 2020 session begins on Jan. 14.

"E-Verify provides a fast, free and effective way for an employer to verify that new hires are authorized to work in the U.S. using the same documents as required by the preexisting I-9 process," Gruters said. "This will protect Florida workers against unfair job competition and wage depression."

"E-Verify is an immigration enforcement tool that protects the wages of citizens and lawful immigrants and will discourage the use of illegal labor in Florida," Byrd said. "I'm proud to stand with Gov. DeSantis in his promise to promote the rule of law and put Americans first."

Gruters and Byrd co-sponsored the 2019 bill, SB 168, that banned "sanctuary cities," even though there has never been a "sanctuary city" in Florida. Both agreed with DeSantis that E-Verify is a necessary component in combating illegal immigration.

"Gov. Ron DeSantis' leadership is why we now have the strongest ban of sanctuary cities in the country," Gruters said. "We are now going to work together again to deliver for Florida workers."

SB 664 faces the same uncertain prospects its predecessors did in 2019 and 2017 with Republican-aligned groups – including the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association, tourism, industry and retail interests – the most vocal opposition.

A coalition of more than 60 business leaders and former elected officials, the Immigration Partnership and Coalition Fund Coalition (IMPAC), formed in September to oppose the bill even before it was filed.

E-Verify "would be a disaster for Florida's economy. With record low unemployment and staggering worker shortages in the hospitality and agriculture sectors, imposing mandatory E-Verify would only further hold back the growth of our economy," the IMPAC Fund wrote in a Sept. 23 letter to Senate President Bill Galvano, House Speaker Jose Oliva and DeSantis.

"E-Verify will hurt Florida's economic growth and industries already struggling to find workers," it said. "E-Verify has a 12 percent error rate and could jeopardize the jobs of 1.1 million U.S. citizens and lawfully present Floridians and cost Florida employers \$4.7 billion to replace lawfully present workers that receive false disqualification, according to CATO Institute, a conservative think tank."