

House lawmakers reach deal on bill to renew E-Verify

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by [Chris Strohm](#)

House lawmakers have reached an agreement on legislation that would renew a program that allows employers to verify the legal status of their workers, breaking a stalemate between two committees over concerns about funding for the Social Security Administration.

The bill emerged from behind-the-scenes negotiations among lawmakers on the House Judiciary Committee and the Ways and Means Committee.

The two sides had been at odds over writing language that would both reauthorize the Homeland Security Department's E-Verify program and preserve Social Security's ability to meet its core mission of providing services to seniors and the disabled.

The bill would reauthorize for five years the E-Verify program, which is an online tool that employers can use to confirm a worker's information against Homeland Security and Social Security databases.



The Senate still must come to an agreement on companion legislation. Without congressional action, the program will expire in November.

The House bill would maintain E-Verify as a voluntary program, even though some states have mandated its use.

But, in a nod to Ways and Means, the bill includes provisions that would ensure Homeland Security provides timely reimbursements to the Social Security Administration for use of that agency's resources.

Lawmakers said Homeland Security had delayed paying such reimbursement. But the two agencies said last week they have reconciled payments and were working on a longer-term funding agreement.

The bill, which was discussed briefly on the floor Wednesday night, might come up for a vote as early as today.

"I think that this bipartisan bill is necessary to pass," said House Judiciary Immigration Subcommittee Chairman Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif.

Rep. Brian Bilbray, R-Calif., chairman of the House Immigration Reform Caucus, said E-Verify has proven to be an effective tool in stopping illegal immigrants from getting jobs.

"It's certainly no secret that illegal employment is what drives illegal immigrants to come to the United States," Bilbray said. "By using E-Verify, employers are no longer expected to be document experts. The liability of determining the legal status of an employee is placed on the government, not the business owner."

Two GAO studies are also authorized under the bill. One will examine the causes and effects of errors in the program. The second will study the experiences that small businesses, nonprofit organizations and municipalities have using the program.

Lawmakers noted that they expect to work on legislation making permanent changes to E-Verify before the end of the five-year extension.

Some lawmakers, such as Bilbray, hope to make the program mandatory across the country. "Making E-Verify mandatory will protect American workers and law-abiding businesses from the unfair competition created by a massive illegal workforce," Bilbray said.

But other lawmakers, such as Ways and Means Social Security Subcommittee ranking member Sam Johnson, R-Texas, say they hope to replace E-Verify with a different system.