

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Ilhan Omar (MN-05)

Subcommittee on Workforce Protections Hearing
"E-Verify: Ensuring Lawful Employment in America"
Wednesday, November 19, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for your testimony today.

Welcome back, everyone. I hope my colleagues across the aisle are rested from their eight-week-long paid vacation. Over the last two months, I have been speaking with my constituents, and I have heard firsthand how the Trump Administration's reckless economic policies and the Republican-fueled health care crisis are impacting their lives. From higher utility prices to expensive grocery bills to rising healthcare premiums, working families are feeling the strain as the cost of living continues to climb.

I had hoped that Congress would return ready to address the real issues affecting the American people. Instead, our hearing today revolves around E-Verify – a 20-year-old program that we already know does not work. E-Verify is an electronic employment eligibility verification system that began as a voluntary pilot program and is now used by only a small percentage of employers. Nothing stops any employer from voluntarily using E-Verify. But despite the fact that it has existed for decades, very few employers use it. Why? Because it simply does not work.

Since 2006, my Republican colleagues have repeatedly tried to mandate its use across the board, but those efforts have all failed because of broad opposition. Widespread use of E-Verify is opposed by the small business community, civil liberties groups, religious organizations, agricultural associations and growers, privacy advocates, libertarian think tanks, and immigration reform groups. Even some libertarian politicians have warned that a national E-Verify mandate would hand the government "[the ultimate on/off switch](#)" for whether any American is allowed to work.

Think about that for a moment: My Republican colleagues claim to be pro-business and the party of small government. And yet they want the federal government to expand a program that would only work with a massive national database that tracks and consolidates private worker information.

In practice, E-Verify has proven ineffective and harmful to employers, immigrants, and American workers. This system often generates errors that deny American citizens and legal permanent residents job opportunities for which they are fully qualified. In 2018, a study by the Cato Institute revealed that over 70,000 legal American workers were told by E-Verify they were not authorized to work. If every employer were forced to use E-Verify, [experts estimate](#) that those errors would hit roughly 200,000 legal workers every year, with tens of thousands wrongly pushed out of the labor market entirely. E-Verify can also facilitate hiring discrimination against job applicants of color, especially those from Latino backgrounds, because employers might unfairly avoid hiring workers who look like they may not pass the system.

So, this is the Republican plan: an ineffective system that is harsh on workers and burdensome on employers. And at a time when the surveillance state only continues to ramp up under President Trump, the last thing we need is to give the government another tool to intrude on our constitutional rights and economic freedom.

To truly help workers, Congress should focus on policies that address their real needs, such as raising wages, guaranteeing paid leave, and ensuring access to quality, affordable health care.

Instead, Congressional Republicans are trying to distract us from their own failing agenda: they are blaming immigrants and dividing our communities while they rip away health care and nutrition assistance from millions of Americans and jack up prices with their reckless tariffs in order to pay for massive tax cuts for the rich.

At a time of real economic uncertainty, our job should be to protect people's livelihoods and bring costs down. E-Verify does nothing to help people pay for their food, their rent, or their child care. It does nothing to protect workers from wage theft, abuse, or unsafe working conditions.

Instead of focusing on a flawed system that would worsen discrimination, complicate life for small businesses, and cause undue stress for job seekers, Congress should use its power to address the real needs of working families. Despite Americans' pleas for help, Congress has not raised the federal minimum wage in fifteen years. We are not focusing on how to expand access to paid leave, child care, or health care. In this very Subcommittee on Workforce Protections, we have yet to hold a hearing this year that actually expands workers' protections. These are the things that this Congress and this Subcommittee should focus on – to create an economy that works for everyone, not just the wealthy and well-connected.

It's time to get back to work and deliver on the issues that the American people truly care about. When I'm in my district, small business owners and workers are not asking for us to mandate E-Verify. I'm hearing about prices rising, wage stagnation, hardworking people unable to find jobs, and small businesses struggling under the weight of President Trump's tariffs. If we want to support working-class people, we need to address these issues and invest in our workforce – not build another broken surveillance tool.

Thank you, and I yield back.