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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DAVID DREIER THE ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AND SOCIAL SECURITY PROTECTION ACT

January 5, 2011

Mr. Speaker, the roots of our broken immigration and employer verification system can be traced to three underlying factors: too many unreliable documents, including the Social Security card; a faulty employment verification system; and lax enforcement. The cornerstone of any immigration and border security reform plan must include an effective employment verification system and enhanced enforcement of our immigration laws. My bill, H.R. 98, the Illegal Immigration Enforcement and Social Security Protection Act, provides a strong foundation on which to build upon.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act created the I-9 system for employers to verify the work authorization status of prospective employees. Currently, there are 26 documents that individuals can use in 102 different combinations to establish work authorization status in the U.S. While well intentioned, this program forces employers to be identification experts while allowing unscrupulous employers to hire illegal immigrants.

The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act sought to improve reliability of the I-9 system by creating the Basic Pilot Program, now known as E-Verify, which allows employers, on a voluntary basis, to use an online system to verify the work authorization status of new employees by checking validity of the Social Security numbers with the Social Security Administration. The implementation of this program has been a step in the right direction. However, several studies have found that the E-Verify program is unable to detect identity fraud, allowing those with valid, but stolen documents, to secure employment.

H.R. 98 builds on the E-Verify program by creating an easy to use electronic verification system based on a secure, tamper-proof Social Security card, which employers can use to electronically verify the work authorization status of prospective employees. The new card includes a digitized photo of the cardholder, as well as an encrypted electronic signature strip, allowing employers to instantaneously verify a prospective employee's work authorization status with the Department of Homeland Security's Employment Eligibility Database, either through a toll-free number or electronic card-reader.

H.R. 98 also increases penalties for employers who hire illegal immigrants or fail to verify their employment eligibility by increasing fines to \$50,000 from \$2,000, applying jail sentences of up to five years per offense, and requiring the employer to pay for deportation. In addition, the bill adds 10,000 new DHS personnel whose sole responsibility will be to enforce employer compliance and prosecute those who illegally employ illegal immigrants.

Mr. Speaker, with newly improved document standards, employers will have a much higher degree of confidence in their hiring decisions. This will help to prevent the hiring of unauthorized workers and stop illegal immigration.