

Mandatory Biometric Worker Identification Cards: A Briefer

New York Senator Charles E. Schumer has proposed the creation of a **mandatory national biometric worker identification card** for all workers in the United States as part of his plan for comprehensive immigration reform.

How would the system work?

Under Schumer's plan, every person who seeks a job in the U.S.—citizens and non-citizens—would be required to present a biometric ID card to potential employers verifying one's eligibility to work. Employers would match an individual's fingerprint to a fingerprint scan on the ID card. This system would provide the backbone for America's first-ever national identity card system—something all Americans and immigrants should oppose.

What would be the process for verifying eligibility for employment?

Step 1: An individual seeking work in the United States would visit a government office and submit personal documents like a birth certificate and Social Security card, pose for digital photographs and have their fingerprints scanned.

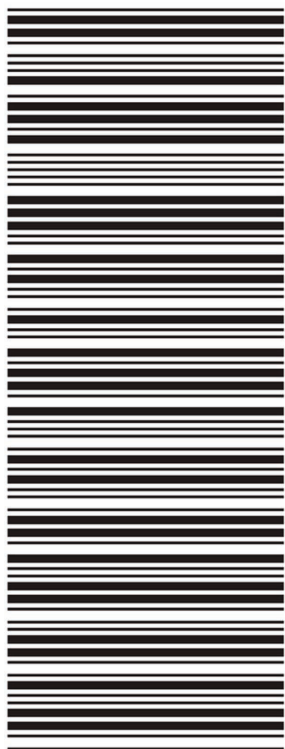
Step 2: The government would digitally embed personal information and the fingerprint data onto an identity card and issue it to the individual. The fingerprint would be deleted, but most of the individual's personal information would be kept in the government's computer system.

Step 3: After being hired, an individual would submit the identity card to an employer, who would swipe the card in an electronic reader. The individual would also submit to a fingerprint scan at work. If the fingerprint data on the scan matches the fingerprint data on the card, the individual would be eligible to work.

The technology in the proposed system raises important concerns:

- The technology necessary to establish the biometric system is unproven and has never been used on such a large scale. The record demonstrates errors are likely—significant hurdles exist in making the system fraud-proof and affordable.
- Forcing workers to submit fingerprint data to get a job treats them like criminals—such data will become more valuable and more sensitive in the future.
- The government will be able to add unlimited amounts of information to the database and identity cards in the future. Past national identity card proposals have included information such as citizenship status, national origin, ethnicity and religion. This could trigger racial and ethnic profiling, and civil rights violations.
- The cards may also include radio-frequency identification (RFID) technology—similar to the E-Z Pass—that would enable remote collection of information, raising serious privacy and civil rights concerns.

Senator Schumer's plan is bad for workers and bad for Americans' rights. It's time to convince Senator Schumer his plan has no place in comprehensive immigration reform.



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The Top 5 Reasons Senator Schumer's Plan is Bad for Americans

1. The National ID card program would make it more difficult for American citizens to get jobs.

Implementing a national identity card system will make it more difficult to obtain work. For the first time, workers will have to receive the government's permission before they can start a job. Inevitable technological problems will cause delays. Errors in the system are unavoidable and employers may avoid the hassle of hiring workers with errors. This also may encourage employers to continue employing immigrant workers off the books. The government should not hinder people's ability to work, especially during a slow economy.

2. The ID card will likely be required for many rights and privileges in the future.

Over time, it's likely the card will be required for purposes other than employment, such as voting, receiving government benefits, entering government buildings, making certain purchases or traveling. A recent study showed that at least 12 percent of Americans earning less than \$25,000 a year do not have access to documents that prove their citizenship status. Not having an identity card or having an error in one's record in the database could result in losing much more than a job—it would make living in the U.S. extremely difficult.

3. The ID card plan poses serious threats to Americans' privacy.

The new identity cards would contain a barcode—like those on credit cards—that leaves a digital fingerprint of an individual's location and activities when swiped. As the network of national ID access points and identity checks grows, Americans could be required to swipe their ID card many times a day, leaving an electronic trail of their activities.

4. A national identity card will increase Americans' risk of identity theft or fraud.

The ID cards and supporting database would be a goldmine for identity thieves. The system would require deploying millions of ID scanners in government buildings and private employers throughout the country. Anyone with card scanner could collect people's sensitive personal information for fraudulent purposes.

5. Americans have always rejected national ID card proposals.

Americans have rejected national identity card proposals since the 1930s as a threat to our traditional values of privacy and liberty. Several presidents, including Nixon and Reagan, opposed national ID cards. The latest attempt—the Real ID Act in 2005—drew formal opposition from 26 states and has not been implemented.

Call Senator Schumer now and tell him his ID card scheme has no place in comprehensive immigration reform.

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Get involved! To learn more about the NYCLU's work on comprehensive immigration reform that respects all New Yorkers' rights and liberties, visit www.nyclu.org/immigrationreform.