Statement for the Record

Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security of the House Judiciary Committee

"H.R. ____, The Legal Workforce Act"

February 4, 2015

The National Immigration Forum works to uphold America's tradition as a nation of immigrants. The Forum advocates for the value of immigrants and immigration to the nation, building support for public policies that reunite families, recognize the importance of immigration to our economy and our communities, protect refugees, encourage newcomers to become new Americans and promote equal protection under the law.

The National Immigration Forum thanks the Subcommittee for holding this hearing in an attempt to fix America's broken immigration system and urges the Subcommittee to take up a broad immigration reform approach.

In 2013 the National Immigration Forum launched Bibles, Badges and Business for Immigration Reform (BBB), an alliance of conservative faith, law enforcement and business leaders, to achieve the goal of broad immigration reform. This network developed through outreach in the evangelical community, the development of state compacts, and regional summits convened across the country which formed a new consensus on immigrants and America. Targeting key states through a combination of field events, media coverage and direct advocacy, BBB and its partners have had more than 700 meetings with Members of Congress and their staffs and have held 303 events in key congressional districts across 40 states.

The National Immigration Forum is opposed to the mandatory use of an electronic work authorization verification system absent broad immigration reform that brings the undocumented out of the shadows and includes a path to citizenship. Without immigration reform, we believe such a worker verification system cannot succeed. If an electronic work authorization verification system is forced on the estimated 7.7 million American employers and

154 million workers without fixing our broken immigration system, the results will be disastrous for everyone in our nation and for our economy.

A large percentage of our workforce is without legal status—5 percent overall and substantially more in industries such as agriculture, dairy, construction, and meat and poultry processing. In agriculture, an estimated 50 to 70 percent lack status. It is common sense to address the problem holistically, by bringing undocumented workers into a revised and expanded legal system so that companies in industries that are very dependent on undocumented workers—agriculture, for example—will not face the choice of risking the consequences of non-compliance, closing altogether or, where possible, moving their operations to other countries.

Whether employers move their workers off the books or offshore, the effect on American workers and consumers would not be positive. While supporters of mandatory verification legislation would like to portray the legislation as a solution for unemployment among Americans, the reality likely will be quite different. American workers either would have to compete in a workforce that would be largely underground, or they would be put out of a job as their employer moved operations outside of the U.S. In agriculture, which is very dependent on an undocumented workforce, for every job lost in farming, three jobs are lost in related support industries. As more of our agricultural production moved to other countries, we would become more dependent on imports and spend more money to import our food.

According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), the imposition of mandatory E-Verify absent immigration reform would result in a loss of more than $17 billion in revenue for the government over a period of 10 years due to the increase in workers who would be working off the books. In contrast, passing broad immigration reform would boost our economy and reduce our deficit. In 2013, the CBO released its "score" of the Senate's broad immigration reform bill, which showed not only that it would reduce the deficit by almost $900 billion in 20 years but also that it would increase the gross domestic product 3.3 percent in the first 10 years and 5.4 percent in the next 10 years.

As stated above, the National Immigration Forum believes a standalone Legal Workforce Act is the wrong approach. Our immigration problem is a national problem that deserves a national, comprehensive approach. Besides the need to account for future flow in our immigration system, one of the key lessons from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act, which resolved the status of most undocumented immigrants but failed to provide for adequate future flows of legal immigrant labor, is that all parts of our complex immigration system are interrelated and must be dealt with in a cohesive manner. Otherwise we will experience unintended consequences and will need to revisit the issues again in the future as the failings are made known.

Congress must work to reform the system as a whole, striking the right balance between interior enforcement and border security, earned legalization and a path to citizenship, needed reforms to

our current family and employer immigration system and efforts to deal with the current immigration backlog. Movement to a piecemeal approach can be workable, provided that Congress considers a holistic package of reforms on a step-by-step basis. It is our hope that this Subcommittee will work to advance bills touching on each of these crucial issues.