



**EMBARGOED UNTIL 7 AM PST THURS. FEB. 9**

## **Report Finds Biometric ID Card Could Cost Taxpayers At Least \$40 Billion**

Berkeley, California, February 9, 2012 – A mandatory biometric employment verification card for all U.S. workers could cost at least \$40 billion, infringe on Americans’ civil liberties, and fail to stop the employment of undocumented immigrants, according to a new report. ***Hard to BELIEVE: The High Cost of a Biometric Identity Card*** finds that a biometric ID card would not only have a hefty initial price tag, but it will also cost \$3 billion in ongoing annual expenditures.

The report, released by the Chief Justice Earl Warren Institute on Law & Social Policy at UC Berkeley School of Law, is a first-ever in-depth analysis of the costs of establishing a biometric employment identity card. The mandatory card, containing a worker’s fingerprints or a hand vein scan, would replace various forms of ID, such as a driver’s license, social security card and passport, during the hiring process.

Republican presidential candidates Mitt Romney (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/2012-presidential-debates/republican-primary-debate-december-15-2011/>, click Immigration tab) and Newt Gingrich (see <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/12/opinion/keller-the-good-newt.html?pagewanted=all>) have both supported a version of a biometric employment card as part of immigration reform during campaign debates. The idea was first raised in 2010 by Senators Charles Schumer (D-NY) and Lindsay Graham (R-SC), among others, but it was never proposed as legislation. According to Schumer’s plan, people would apply for this government biometric card and then present it to an employer or third-party verifier.

“The idea of a biometric ID card failed to gain political traction on Capitol Hill and for good reason: It can’t deliver all that it promises to U.S. taxpayers who will be footing the bill,” said Aarti Kohli, director of immigration policy at the Berkeley Law Warren Institute.

“A biometric employment verification system would require setting up a large new bureaucracy to create a master database with information relating to every worker in the country—an enormous and expensive project,” said Jonathan Weinberg, co-author of the report and professor of law at Wayne State University. “It would involve collecting biometric data from, verifying the identity of, and issuing secure ID cards to more than 150 million people—and that’s just the beginning.” The program would also require every company across the country, from mom and pop shops to global corporations, to verify each worker’s identity with a card–verification reader.

“The biometric worker ID would have to rely on current government databases that still have significant errors. Even a one percent error rate could cause 1.5 million citizens to be flagged as unemployable,”

said Michael Froomkin, co-author and professor of law at the University of Miami. “Each of them would then have to go through an appeals process before they could legally work. Bottom line, this plan will disproportionately hurt people who most need work: the poor, short-term and temporary employees, the homeless, and the unemployed.” Froomkin said.

As part of the study, the authors analyzed the program’s costs to government agencies, employers, and workers, and calculated losses to U.S. economic production. To compute start-up and ongoing costs, they applied budget estimates from the Congressional Budget Office and the Government Accountability Office for various government programs. The data assumes 150 million US workers in the labor pool, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010 numbers.

“We examined two core issues: the financial impact of the program and its potential effectiveness. In both cases, the program failed to deliver,” said Kohli. “Not only that, it opened up a Pandora’s box of civil liberty violations.”

***Findings of Hard to BELIEVE: The High Cost of a Biometric Identity Card include:***

- **A comprehensive biometric ID for over 150 million workers could cost US taxpayers up to \$45 billion, about four times higher than other estimates;**
- **Errors in current databases could delay the employment of at least 1.5 million people;**
- **The black market for fraudulent documents such as birth certificates and passports would increase;**
- **The biometric ID cards and national database would be vulnerable to a data breach resulting in large-scale identity theft; and**
- **The widespread collection of fingerprints or vein scans will face legal challenges as a violation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures.**

The full report can be viewed here: <http://www.law.berkeley.edu/11005.htm>

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