

## **Preparing immigrant workers for change; A local nonprofit fears fallout from a new policy.**

The Philadelphia Inquirer

August 21, 2007 Tuesday, CITY-D Edition

Copyright 2007 Philadelphia Newspapers, LLC All Rights Reserved

**Section:** NATIONAL; P-com News for PC Home Page; Pg. A01

**Length:** 1094 words

**Byline:** By Michael Matza

Inquirer Staff Writer

### **Body**

---

With the federal government pledging to crack down on undocumented **workers** by using Social Security records as its principal sledge, companies that employ large numbers of **immigrants** are **preparing** to feel the heat.

The Welcoming Center for **New** Pennsylvanians, a job center for foreign-born **workers**, with offices in Philadelphia and Upper Darby, is gearing up, too - for the expected **fallout**.

"We're very worried about this," said Anne O'Callaghan, the center's executive director. "The Social Security database is known to be faulty. If you use it for immigration enforcement, it is certain some significant number of work-authorized **immigrants** will be unjustly fired."

A report in December by the Social Security Administration's inspector general found the database had an error rate of 4.1 percent. Misspellings, data-entry mishaps, name **changes** and other mistakes involve about 17.8 million records.

Nonetheless, Department of Homeland Security chief Michael Chertoff recently announced a **new** emphasis on the rules that require companies to terminate employees with dubious Social Security numbers or face fines of up to \$2,200 per illegal **worker**.

How the initiative will work remains to be seen, because a Homeland Security spokeswoman acknowledged last week that an IRS privacy provision prevents direct sharing of information between her department and the Social Security Administration.

The movement for stricter enforcement of existing laws comes on the heels of the Senate's deadlock over legislation to overhaul immigration.

While watching to see whether the government means what it says, groups such as the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates immigration restrictions, say the crackdown is overdue.

"The standard response to illegal immigration has been increased border enforcement. And, in fact, such tightening of the border was long overdue," the group wrote on its Web site. "But there has been almost no attention paid to enforcement at work sites within the United States."

Starting next month, authorities are to rigorously enforce the so-called no-match letters that the SSA has, since 1994, sent to companies whenever names, Social Security numbers, and W-2 forms don't jibe.

Preparing immigrant workers for change; A local nonprofit fears fallout from a new policy.

Companies have frequently ignored the letters with little consequence. Even when new regulations went into effect after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, enforcement generally was lax.

Now "no-match" mailings will include separate letters from the DHS warning companies and suspect employees that they have four months to reconcile discrepancies or face prosecution, deportation, and increased civil penalties against the companies "for knowingly employing an unauthorized person."

To prepare immigrants and employers for workplace raids and other tough enforcement measures, the Welcoming Center, a nonprofit serving Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania suburbs, stresses the contributions of immigrants to the regional economy, holds information sessions for employers, and distributes "The Changing Face of Pennsylvania's Workforce," a 26-page primer about hiring foreign-born workers that includes information about the dozen or so visa categories permitting people to work seasonally or permanently in the United States.

Among the primer's findings:

An average 8 percent of the Greater Philadelphia population was "foreign born" in the decade 1970 to 1980; an average 37 percent was foreign born in the decade 1990 to 2000.

In 1970, the top five countries of origin for immigrants relocating to Greater Philadelphia were all in Europe; in 2005, none were. The leading country in 1970 was Italy. In 2005, it was India.

Whereas immigrants once settled almost exclusively in inner-city neighborhoods, now many settle directly in suburbia. The foreign-born population of Delaware County, for example, rose 33 percent from 2000 to 2005.

Since 2003, the Welcoming Center has provided job referrals and other assistance to more than 2,000 clients from 62 countries. The center's diverse staff of 10 speaks at least eight languages and provides newcomers with leads on where to study English.

At a recent legal briefing the center held for a half-dozen employers, including a home-health-care agency and a Philadelphia community center, there was palpable fear about the impact of the new rules, said lawyer Elizabeth Surin, who gave the briefing.

If we can't verify, do we have to fire them? attendees asked. "It was clear from the audience," Surin said, "it was a big concern."

Although the stereotype of an immigrant is a low-skilled, low-wage, possibly undocumented laborer, the center provides assistance only to people who are legally permitted to work in the United States and can prove it. Many are well educated. They held high-status jobs in their native lands and had to settle for less after arriving here.

The center's goal is to match these people and others like them with appropriate employers - not only because that's a nice thing to do, but also because it makes sense for the region economically.

Pennsylvania's population is among the nation's oldest. Waves of retirements could lead to chronic shortages of qualified workers in health care, information technology, and other critical industries, the center contends.

"Pennsylvania has the second-oldest workforce in America. If demography is destiny, where does that leave us in 10 years?" O'Callaghan asked, adding that work-eligible immigrants are an "undervalued human resource" for the region's productivity.

At the other end of the spectrum are the people who "milk our cows, bake our bread, cut our lawns, build our roofs," immigration lawyer Hector Chichoni said. They may work illegally at the moment, he said, but they deserve a shot at becoming legal. Pathways to legal status are what the Senate legislation contemplated, along with stringent enforcement measures, but efforts at a compromise failed.

Preparing immigrant workers for change; A local nonprofit fears fallout from a new policy.

Chichoni, 45, an Italian-born, Argentinian-raised Miami lawyer and author of a chapter called "What to Do When the Government Knocks at Your Door: Dealing With Trouble" in a publication for immigrants, believes federal "manpower will never be enough to police all the employers in the United States."

Compounding the problem, he said, is the fact that a portion of the undocumented immigrant workforce - freelance landscapers, for example - is virtually invisible because it operates on a cash-only basis.

"How is the government going identify those people?" he asked. "They are not in the system and will never go into the system."

Contact staff writer Michael Matza at 215-854-2541 or [mmatza@phillynews.com](mailto:mmatza@phillynews.com).

## Graphic

---

Photograph by: Feed Loader

## Classification

---

**Language:** ENGLISH

**Publication-Type:** Newspaper

**Subject:** IMMIGRATION (91%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (90%); SOCIAL SECURITY (90%); US SOCIAL SECURITY (90%); FOREIGN LABOR (90%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (89%); FINES & PENALTIES (89%); DISMISSALS (78%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (78%); MIGRATION ISSUES (78%); BORDER CONTROL (78%); LEGISLATION (78%); WRONGFUL TERMINATION (78%); NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS (78%); LEGISLATIVE BODIES (78%); EMPLOYEE TERMINATION (78%); LABOR FORCE (78%); SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE FORCES (78%); NATIONAL SECURITY (73%); SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK (73%); RECRUITMENT & HIRING (73%); EXECUTIVES (70%); RESEARCH INSTITUTES (69%); TERRORISM (67%)

**Organization:** SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION (83%); US DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (74%)

**Industry:** WEBSITES (62%)

**Person:** MICHAEL CHERTOFF (58%)

**Geographic:** PHILADELPHIA, PA, USA (92%); PENNSYLVANIA, USA (94%); UNITED STATES (92%)

**Load-Date:** August 21, 2007