

Norton Calls ID Markets Terror Magnet

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Body

Del. Eleanor Holmes **Norton** **called** yesterday for a congressional hearing on whether the sale of fake identification cards in Adams Morgan and other parts of the country could attract terrorists.

"My concern, as a member of the Select Committee on Homeland Security, is that flagrant and notorious fraudulent document **markets** will become **magnets** for terrorism," **Norton** (D-D.C.) said in a letter to Rep. Christopher Cox (R-Calif.), chairman of the committee, and Rep. Jim Turner (Tex.), the panel's ranking Democrat.

"Production and open vending of [fake] documents in the heart of the nation's capital is at best an embarrassment, at worst a security danger," she wrote.

U.S. immigration authorities have cracked down recently on the notorious **market** along Columbia Road NW, where vendors for years have peddled fake Social Security cards, U.S. residency permits and other documents. Officials have made nearly 50 arrests and seized more than 1,000 phony **IDs** since Operation Card Shark began in May 2002.

But the trade continues.

On a national level, meanwhile, immigration officials have been so overwhelmed by new anti-terrorism tasks that they have reduced the number of investigations into fake document rings, officials from the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement said. They said most purchasers of the fake cards were unauthorized immigrants hoping to use them to get jobs.

Norton emphasized that she didn't think such immigrants were terrorists. But she said she is worried that the easy availability of phony **IDs** could be exploited.

"It seems to me you can't have open-air document selling in the capital of the United States," she said in an interview. "You've got to show you can clean it up here. . . . That sends a mega-message to these **markets**, which obviously are across the United States."

Norton noted in her letter that she had asked the federal government last year for \$ 1 million to help eliminate the fake document trade in the District. The request was denied.

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Vince Sollitto, a spokesman for the Homeland Security Committee, said he had not yet seen **Norton's** letter and so had no response to the request for a hearing. But, he added, "The issue of fraudulent **IDs** is one of great interest to the committee, one we'll continue to examine."

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