

April 14, 2010

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: **Oppose Schumer/Graham Biometric National ID Proposal within Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

Dear Senator:

We write today to express our opposition to a proposal by Senators Charles Schumer (D – NY) and Lindsey Graham (R – SC) to create a biometric Social Security card – one that relies on personal characteristics like fingerprints to identify individuals. No one disputes that our broken immigration system harms both immigrants and non-immigrants, but a full scale National ID system is not the solution.

Both Republicans and Democrats have opposed a National ID system. President Reagan likened a 1981 proposal to the biblical "mark of the beast," and President Clinton dismissed a similar plan because it smacked of Big Brother. A National ID would not only violate privacy by helping to consolidate data and facilitate tracking of individuals, it would bring government into the very center of our lives by serving as a government permission slip needed by everyone in order to work. As happened with Social Security cards decades ago, use of such ID cards would quickly spread and be used for other purposes – from travel to voting to gun ownership.

Contrary to the contentions of Senators Schumer and Graham, it would be impossible to create such a system without establishing a national database – a central electronic repository – of Americans' personal information. Every government identification system currently in existence requires a database. Databases are necessary in order to reissue lost or stolen cards and as a check on fraud and abuse. Without record keeping, the same Social Security number and birth certificate could be used again and again to issue new cards to different people – defeating the entire purpose of the system. Such a central repository will be irresistible to identity thieves, hackers and those who want to misuse personal information for crimes like stalking.

The cost of this system will be extraordinary, running to hundreds of billions of dollars and dwarfing the expense associated with other parts of immigration reform. As one example, the federal government recently began to issue a limited number of biometric ID cards, called Transportation Worker Identification Credentials. It is estimated that the Department of Homeland Security will spend \$1.9 billion to issue cards to approximately 1 million workers. Expanded to the entire US workforce of 150 million people, that would translate to a proportionately greater cost of \$285 billion. A biometric system would likely have to be fee based – requiring not just government permission, but also a government fee to work.

Adding insult to injury, this unaffordable scheme will probably never work. Even ignoring the enormous difficulties of creating a system to fingerprint every worker and distributing readers to employers across the country, the truth is that some employers prefer the

ambiguity of the current process. Unless significantly greater resources are dedicated to enforcing the law, employers will continue to have a strong incentive to circumvent a broken system. Such enforcement could be accomplished just as easily without a National ID.

A biometric ID system would be controversial and unpopular with constituencies across the ideological spectrum. It would require the fingerprinting of every American worker – not just immigrants. It would also require the creation of a bureaucracy that combines the worst elements of the Transportation Security Administration and state Motor Vehicle Departments.

For all of these reasons we believe that a National ID system should play no part in the otherwise needed reform of our immigration system.

Sincerely,

American Civil Liberties Union  
American Library Association  
American Policy Center  
Americans for Tax Reform  
Bill of Rights Defense Committee  
Calegislation  
Campaign for Liberty  
Center for Digital Democracy  
Center for Financial Privacy and Human Rights  
Citizen Outreach  
Citizens Against Government Waste  
Citizens Committee for the Right to Keep and Bear Arms  
Competitive Enterprise Institute  
Consumer Action  
Consumer Federation of America  
Consumer Watchdog  
Cyber Privacy Project  
Defending Dissent Foundation  
DownsizeDC.org, Inc.  
Electronic Frontier Foundation  
Electronic Privacy Information Center  
Equal Justice Alliance  
Former Congressman Bob Barr  
Hispanic Leadership Fund  
Home School Legal Defense Association  
Indian American Republican Council  
Liberty Coalition  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Lawyer's Guild--National Office  
National Whistleblower Center  
Patient Privacy Rights  
Privacy Activism

Privacy International  
Privacy Journal  
Privacy Lives  
Privacy Rights Clearinghouse  
Privacy Times  
PrivacyRightsNow Coalition  
Rutherford Institute  
The 5-11 Campaign  
The Identity Project  
The Multiracial Activist  
U.S. Bill of Rights Foundation  
World Privacy Forum