



# Telecon Recap: Immigration Status Verification for Drivers' Licenses, Public Benefits, and Social Security Cards: A Conversation with USCIS

On May 25, 2011, the Citizenship and Immigration Services Ombudsman's Office (Ombudsman's Office) hosted a public teleconference regarding the Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program and interviewed two USCIS officials, Chief of the Office of the SAVE Program, John Roessler, and Deputy Chief, Alissar Rahi.

Mr. Roessler and Ms. Rahi provided a brief overview of the SAVE Program, as summarized below.

## Why was the SAVE Program created?

Mr. Roessler explained that SAVE was designed to aid benefit-granting agencies in determining an applicant's immigration status to ensure that only entitled applicants receive certain federal, state, and local public benefits and/or licenses. SAVE does not make determinations on any applicant's eligibility for a specific benefit or license, rather, SAVE verifies immigration status data compiled from different U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data systems.

## How does the SAVE Program work?

Mr. Roessler summarized how the SAVE Program uses an online system to check a benefit applicant's immigration status information against records contained in various DHS databases:

- **First Step:** SAVE begins verifying the legal status of nonimmigrants, immigrants, and naturalized citizens with an initial verification (results generated in 3–5 seconds).
- **Second Step:** Additional verification is necessary in some instances where status cannot be verified through the first step. This does not necessarily mean that the applicant is not authorized to be in the United States, or is ineligible to receive the benefit. A second verification query will be automated, but may take up to 3 -5 working days to generate a response.
- **Third Step:** A third query may be necessary where verification is not confirmed through the first and second steps. The benefit agency submits [Form G-845, Document Verification Request](#) (PDF - 2 pages, 101 KB), with copies of an applicant's proof of status documentation to the SAVE Program verifiers for review. This process may take 10-20 work days.

## Who uses SAVE?

SAVE provides verification services to over 800 federal, state, and local benefit granting and licensing entities. SAVE customers include the Social Security Administration, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Education, and state and local agencies such as the California Department of Motor Vehicles. Certain states have mandated the use of SAVE for all public benefit granting agencies in the state.

## What data does USCIS use to determine an individual's immigration status that is reported in SAVE to federal, state, and local agencies?

SAVE verifies applicant data contained in DHS databases from USCIS, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

### **What kind of outreach information and training does USCIS provide to agencies that use SAVE?**

Mr. Roessler explained that USCIS engages with the public through webinars, conferences, and informational materials. SAVE hosts an annual user forum for customer agencies to discuss program initiatives and improvements as well as to garner customer feedback.

Mr. Roessler noted that SAVE's primary relationship is with the benefit-granting agencies, but also emphasized how the public can access information on SAVE. Most recently, SAVE provided its customer agencies with an information sheet on [How to Correct Your Records](#) in 17 different languages for distribution to benefit applicants.

### **How quickly is a change of status reflected in the SAVE database?**

Mr. Roessler noted that SAVE is not a database because it does not own any of the records upon which it queries for verification of legal status. SAVE uses an online system that queries for data from multiple sources, including those that are updated in real-time and others that are updated in daily uploads. Additionally, Ms. Rahi shared that because SAVE relies on records owned and managed by other DHS components; SAVE has no control over process speed.

### **How may an individual fix an erroneous record that appears in SAVE?**

To correct your immigration record, individuals should contact USCIS by scheduling an InfoPass appointment, either at a local USCIS office or at the [InfoPass website](#), or by calling the National Customer Service Center at 1-800-375-5283.

If the error in an individual's immigration document occurred upon entry to the United States, Mr. Roessler suggested contacting CBP by visiting a local [Deferred Inspection Site](#) (*PDF -10 pages, 28 KB*) or a [Port of Entry or Admission](#) to have it corrected.

### **Who staffs the SAVE Help e-mail and 1-888 line and for what purpose can these be used?**

The SAVE Help e-mail and 1-888 line are staffed by the Customer Contact Operations (CCO) in USCIS' Verifications Division and are available to SAVE customer agencies to help them with cases they have submitted. Mr. Roessler emphasized that the SAVE Help email and 1-888 line are not for individual applicants to correct erroneous records.

### **What is the future of SAVE? What is USCIS doing now and where is the program going?**

Mr. Roessler shared that the SAVE Program has experienced increased growth as states have begun mandating its use, and anticipates this growth to continue. With this in mind, the SAVE Program is planning initiatives to improve service to customers and enhance program transparency, including:

1. performing independent evaluations of its program requirements and supporting systems to improve SAVE;
2. enhancing the capabilities for customer benefits agencies such as updating the current profile structure, connecting to additional data sources, and providing a photo tool capability; and
3. expansion of current training and outreach materials.

### **Where can I go for additional information on SAVE?**

More information on the SAVE Program is available on the [USCIS SAVE website](#).

Callers also had the opportunity to ask questions, many of which are included below.

**A caller noted inconsistencies in SAVE that negatively impact vulnerable populations. When queried, SAVE is not recognizing newly arrived refugees and asylees because their information is not updated in the databases that feed SAVE in a timely manner. As a result, these**

**vulnerable populations cannot access the time-sensitive benefits to which they are entitled. What is SAVE doing to protect this vulnerable population?**

Ms. Rahi answered that SAVE is aware of this problem, but does not control the timeliness with which this information appears in the source databases. She did note that SAVE is working with the components who own the source data to improve connectivity and expand real time updates.

**Why are foreign students experiencing problems when they try to apply for benefits at the Social Security Administration and driver's licenses at Departments of Motor Vehicles?**

The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is a web-based system that tracks and monitor schools and programs, students, exchange visitors, and their dependents while approved to participate in the U.S. education system. SAVE works with SEVIS representatives to address issues that arise for foreign students studying in the United States. Mr. Roessler directed questions or issues with benefits eligibility for foreign students to the SEVIS program.

**What type of oversight mechanism does SAVE use?**

Ms. Rahi explained that each customer agency has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SAVE outlining the requirements for use of the SAVE business process, which includes the three steps outlined above. Each customer agency is required to use all three steps, if necessary, to complete the verification process. However, it is the agency's responsibility to initiate the additional verification, at its own expense.

SAVE's Office of Monitoring and Compliance utilizes several functions to determine efficiency and ensure compliance by benefits agencies.

**What precautions does SAVE take to prevent fraud and protect privacy?**

Customer agencies and SAVE both have a responsibility to implement privacy protections on behalf of benefit applicants. Every piece of information entered into, or received from, the SAVE system is considered Personally Identifiable Information (PII). All PII in the SAVE system is considered sensitive, unclassified information and must be protected to prevent unauthorized use.

**What measures can an individual take to prevent the need for additional verification when applying for a benefit?**

Mr. Roessler instructed listeners to have erroneous information corrected in the appropriate immigration database before applying for a benefit or license.

**How do I prove my legal status in order to qualify for a driver's license in my state?**

Each state has different rules for driver's licenses. SAVE does not make public benefits determinations; SAVE merely verifies legal status based on an inquiry from the benefit granting agency. Look to your state's local Department of Motor Vehicles for information on qualifying for a driver's license.

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**Homeland  
Security**

## The Ombudsman's Public Teleconference Series

The Ombudsman's Office hosts public teleconferences to share information on specific topics and to hear your comments and suggestions regarding your interactions with the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

### Upcoming Teleconference

#### Immigration Status Verification for Drivers' Licenses, Public Benefits, and Social Security Cards: A Conversation with USCIS

May 25, 2011, 2:00 – 3:00 EST

The Ombudsman's Office invites you to participate in a public teleconference on "**Immigration Status Verification for Drivers' Licenses, Public Benefits, and Social Security Cards: A Conversation with USCIS.**" The Ombudsman's Office will interview guest speakers from USCIS' Office of Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) Program. SAVE is a status verification system used by Social Security, Public Benefits programs, and certain state and local licensing programs. We will reserve time for your questions, comments, and suggestions.

To participate, please RSVP to [oisombudsman.publicaffairs@dhs.gov](mailto:oisombudsman.publicaffairs@dhs.gov).

Participation in these teleconferences is anonymous for callers.