

# ALIEN REGISTRATION

## Usefulness of a Nonimmigrant Alien Annual Address Reporting Requirement Is Questionable

### Why GAO Did This Study

Since 1940, Congress has provided a statutory framework that requires aliens entering or residing in the United States to provide address information. By 1981, aliens who remain in the United States for 30 days or more were required to initially register and report their address information and then to report their change of address only if they move. In the months immediately following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, federal investigators' efforts to locate and interview nearly one-half of the 4,112 nonimmigrant aliens they attempted to contact were impeded by lack of current address information.

Nonimmigrant aliens are defined as those who seek temporary entry into the United States for a specific purpose, including those aliens who are in the country as students, international representatives, or temporary workers, or for business or pleasure. Because of growing concern over the government's need to locate aliens, the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act of 2002 directed GAO to study the feasibility and the utility of a requirement that each nonimmigrant alien in the United States self-report a current address on a yearly basis.

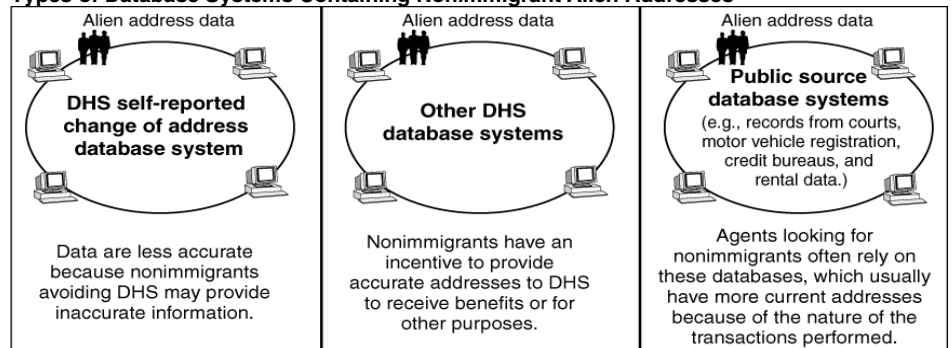
### What GAO Found

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officials told us that while implementing an annual address reporting requirement for nonimmigrant aliens is technically feasible, such a requirement would increase the number of reporting forms DHS would have to process. In turn, this increase would raise form-processing costs from an estimated \$1.6 million to at least an estimated \$4.6 million per year, according to DHS, which does not include the cost of enforcing the annual reporting requirement.

The consensus of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents, who investigate activities that may violate immigration law, was that a self-reporting system would be of limited use in locating aliens who are avoiding contact with the government. Nonimmigrant aliens who do not wish to be located are not likely to comply with an annual requirement to self-report address information. Consequently, agents use other databases to locate this class of alien as well as nonimmigrant aliens who may not be aware of address reporting requirements. Public and private databases that record information concerning benefits, an alien's department of motor vehicle records, or credit bureau information are examples of information sources that agents have used to locate nonimmigrant aliens. Despite the unreliability of self-reported information, some agents did recognize the possibility of limited enforcement benefits for implementing an annual address reporting requirement, such as verifying that compliant nonimmigrant aliens are still in the country and providing a basis for detaining noncompliant nonimmigrant aliens. However, existing systems are available for compliant nonimmigrant aliens to notify DHS of address changes. Also, DHS already has the authority to detain all aliens not in compliance with current change of address reporting requirements but has seldom used the authority. Consequently, it is questionable whether the usefulness of an annual reporting requirement would outweigh the cost of implementation and enforcement.

DHS reviewed a draft of this report and had technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

#### Types of Database Systems Containing Nonimmigrant Alien Addresses



Source: GAO.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-204](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-204).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.