



### Why This Matters

Without specific authorization to remain in the United States, over 800,000 people who have been ordered deported or removed but still reside in the United States are out of status and generally not entitled to many government benefits. Federal, state, and local benefit and licensing agencies rely on the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS)'s Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) to verify an individual's immigration status to determine eligibility. Without accurate information on immigration status, agencies that rely on SAVE verification risks granting benefits to unentitled individuals.

### DHS Response

USCIS concurred with all four recommendations. USCIS stated that status verification is only one part of an eligibility determination, and that safeguards such as criminal background checks that are implemented at some benefit granting agencies help ensure program integrity. Multiple offices within USCIS as well as Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components manage records that SAVE uses for verification. Specifically, Immigration and Customs Enforcement manages records on administrative final orders of removal. USCIS plans to coordinate with these offices and components to ensure data is up to date and accurate for verification purposes.

#### For Further Information:

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## Improvements Needed for SAVE to Accurately Determine Immigration Status of Individuals Ordered Deported

### What We Determined

SAVE provided information that was sometimes outdated and erroneous about an individual's immigration status to benefit granting and licensing agencies. Our random statistical sample tests of SAVE confirmations from fiscal 1 October 2008 to 1 April 2012 of individuals who had been ordered deported but remained in the United States (U.S.) identified a 12 percent error rate in immigration status verification. In other words, in nearly 1 out of 8 times that it is queried, SAVE erroneously verified that an individual had lawful immigration status when they no longer had status. We determined that the USCIS' Central Index System (CIS), the primary system SAVE accesses to validate an individual's immigration status, was generally not updated when the Immigration Court issued a decision to deport, remove, or exclude an individual. Instead, the immigration status codes were updated after an individual had physically left the U.S., a process which may take years.

Without accurate information on immigration status, agencies risk granting benefits ranging from Medicaid to welfare assistance, for which lawful immigration status is a determining factor, to unentitled individuals. In addition to these benefits, individuals we examined applied for benefits ranging from drivers licenses and education assistance to Transportation Worker Identification Cards that provide access to secure areas. Some individuals in our sample had committed felonies ranging from citizenship fraud to aggravated assault.

### What We Recommend

We recommend that the Deputy Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services:

- 1) Determine what data interfaces are necessary for SAVE to reflect the timely status of individuals who have lost status as a result of a final removal order or expiration of time permitted to file an appeal.
- 2) Develop an automated interface that will result in SAVE accurately reflecting the immigration status of individuals who have lost status as a result of a final removal order or expiration of time permitted to file an appeal.
- 3) Conduct periodic evaluations to validate the accuracy of SAVE initial verification.
- 4) Analyze the periodic evaluation results to determine whether SAVE is at risk of verifying other populations erroneously.