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

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