FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact
Patrick Getlein
Communications Director
patrick@thecommonwealthinstitute.org
804-396-2051 x103
www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org

June 2, 2015

Immigrants Play Key Role in Central Virginia Economy

Four out of five are in prime working years, but challenges remain

RICHMOND, VA – Four out of five immigrants in central Virginia are between the ages of 18 and 65, according to new analysis released today by the Commonwealth Institute, an economic research and policy organization based in Richmond. Among native-born Virginians, the rate is 3 out of 5.

“That’s an important finding because it means immigrants are making economic contributions right now rather than some time in the future,” says Institute President Michael Cassidy. “Too often the economic contributions of immigrants gets overlooked in the public discussion about policies that affect foreign-born residents,” he says. “That needs to change.”

The new analysis was released this morning at a public gathering of immigrant leaders, businesses, and advocates at the Meadowdale Library in Chesterfield. The event was co-sponsored by the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; the Virginia Asian Chamber of Commerce; the Legal Aid Justice Center; and the Sacred Heart Center.

Among the report’s key findings:

- Immigrants living in central Virginia are diverse, and most have been in the United States for many years.
  - The most common country of origin for immigrants living in central Virginia is India, but no country accounts for more than 11 percent of central Virginia’s foreign-born residents.
  - Half of foreign-born residents of the region have been in the United States for more than 15 years.
  - Four in ten immigrants living in central Virginia are U.S. citizens.

- Foreign-born residents of central Virginia are mostly working-age and many are operating businesses.
Four out of five immigrants in central Virginia are between the ages of 18 and 65. Among native-born Virginians, the rate is just 3 out of 5. That’s important because it means immigrants are making economic contributions right now rather than some time in the future.

More than 1 in 10 of the region’s entrepreneurs are immigrants, with 4,100 operating their own businesses. That’s a higher rate than for native-born residents of the region.

- Immigrants in central Virginia are well educated.
- More than 1 in 3 has at least a bachelor’s degree, and 17 percent have an advanced degree. These rates are far higher than in the United States as a whole.

“But the state’s immigrants also face a number of challenges,” cautions Cassidy. Despite high employment levels, he says, many immigrants in the region lack health insurance. In addition, while most immigrants in the region are doing well, there are still large number of immigrant workers with less than a high school education, working low-wage jobs, and unable to speak English well.

“We shouldn’t forget this group when we talk about the economic contributions of immigrants,” he says. “We need to work together to make sure all of our region’s workers and families have the opportunity to succeed.”

The full report, Vital for Prosperity: The facts about immigrants and their contributions to the central Virginia economy, can be found online at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

####

About The Commonwealth Institute
The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis provides credible, independent, and accessible information and analyses of fiscal and economic issues with particular attention to the impacts on low- and moderate-income persons. Our products inform fiscal and budget policy debates and contribute to sound decisions that improve the well-being of individuals, communities and Virginia as a whole. Visit www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org for more information.