



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 19, 2017

Media Contact

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

Immigrants Strengthen Virginia's Economy and Communities, New Report Shows

RICHMOND, VA -- Immigrants play an increasingly important role in Virginia's economy. Yet, these contributions often are minimized by some state and federal lawmakers.

"Too many politicians are using scare tactics and divisive rhetoric about immigrants to advance their own agendas," said Laura Goren, Institute Research Director and co-author of the report. "The truth is that immigrants make our communities and our economy stronger."

New analysis from The Commonwealth Institute, an economic and fiscal policy organization in Richmond, breaks through the stereotypes and finds that immigrant households in Virginia have high levels of post-secondary education, high household incomes, and are increasingly important to the state's economy.

Among the report's key findings:

- **Virginia immigrants are well educated and have high rates of employment, resulting in high household incomes.** Almost three-fourths of foreign-born immigrants in Virginia are working or looking for work. In addition, Virginia immigrants are far more likely than their peers in other states to work in white-collar jobs such as the professional, scientific, and management industry. This is likely due to high educational levels: 41 percent of Virginia immigrants have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to only 36 percent for U.S.-born state residents. As a result, in 2015 the median income of immigrant-headed households in Virginia was \$73,420, compared to \$51,482 for the U.S.
- **Immigrants are critical to Virginia's communities and economy.** Foreign-born Virginians are 12.2 percent of the state population, up from 10.3 in 2007. More than half of Virginia's immigrants are now U.S.-citizens. And 1 in 5 Virginia children live in a home with at least one foreign-born parent. Economically, immigrants are critical to helping keep traditional commercial districts afloat, making up 34 percent of all Main Street business owners.
- **Immigrant communities face challenges as well.** While naturalized immigrants in Virginia have comparable health insurance coverage rates to the U.S.-born population, noncitizen immigrants are more than four times as likely to be uninsured. House costs

are also a challenge: Almost a third of Virginia's immigrants pay more than 30 percent of their incomes towards housing costs -- a rate considered to make a family "housing cost burdened." And although the majority of immigrants in Virginia speak English "very well," less than half of noncitizen immigrants in the state do. This can pose challenges for navigating job markets and legal systems.

- **Unauthorized immigrants also make important economic contributions.** Virginia's unauthorized immigrants contribute more than \$250 million each year in state and local taxes. If unauthorized immigrants were offered a path to citizenship, the state could generate an estimated \$100 million in additional revenue through increased tax compliance.

"Moving at the state and local level to break down barriers and better welcome immigrants into Virginia's communities and economy is the right thing to do for Virginia's children and future," says Goren.

The full report, *Immigrants in Virginia: Cornerstones of Prosperous Communities*, is available at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

Bonus data: Infographics showing the economic contributions of immigrants in legislative districts with large immigrant communities.

--30--

####

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.