New Data: The Diverse Immigrant Communities of Hampton Roads Provide Key Contributions, Yet Face Barriers to Health Coverage

RICHMOND, VA -- The diverse immigrant communities of Hampton Roads are woven into the economy and communities. Yet despite most immigrants in the region having high levels of education, with two-thirds having at least some college education, many families face high housing costs and health insurance coverage lags.

Around 1 in 5 area immigrants work in Hampton Roads service occupations, meaning many are front-line, essential workers during this pandemic, according to a new report by The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis. And many immigrant workers on the front lines face barriers to health insurance coverage. Naturalized foreign-born residents have similar rates of health coverage as U.S. born residents in the Hampton Roads region, yet people who are not citizens have much lower coverage rates.

“Policymakers should work to close health coverage gaps, especially during this pandemic, and address remaining challenges such as removing the ‘40 quarters’ barrier to Medicaid coverage facing some lawful permanent residents,” said Laura Goren, Institute Research Director and co-author of the report.

Among the report’s key findings:

- Immigrants in Hampton Roads are diverse, long-standing pillars of the community
  - About 1 in 10 of all foreign-born Virginians live in Hampton Roads with about 40% of immigrants in the region residing in Virginia Beach.
  - The race, ethnicity, and country of origin of immigrants in the region is diverse - almost 8 in 10 immigrants in the region are people of color. The most common country of origin for immigrants living in Hampton Roads is the Philippines, but no country accounts for more than 21% of the region's foreign-born residents.
  - Over half of foreign-born residents in Hampton Roads are U.S. citizens.
• Hampton Roads immigrants are well-educated and work in a variety of fields
  ○ Around 1 in 5 area immigrants work in service occupations, meaning many are
type-line, essential workers during this pandemic.
  ○ Foreign-born residents have a higher rate of labor force participation than U.S.
born residents.
  ○ Two-thirds of the foreign-born population in Hampton Roads have attained at
least some college education or higher, and over one-third have a bachelor’s
degree or a professional degree -- higher rates than for the foreign-born
population nationally.

• Most Hampton Roads immigrants have found success, although challenges
  remain
  ○ Median household incomes for immigrants in Hampton Roads are about the
same as those of U.S.-born residents in the region, though earnings lag for some
immigrants of color.
  ○ Around 28% of all foreign-born area residents pay more than 30% of their income
towards housing costs, the same rate as U.S. born residents.
  ○ Health coverage gaps remain - naturalized foreign-born residents have similar
rates of health coverage as U.S. born residents, yet people who are not citizens
have much lower coverage rates.

“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 families and future,”
says Goren.

The full report, Pillars of the Hampton Roads Community: A Profile of Our Immigrant Neighbors,
is available at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org. A Spanish-language version and reports
about immigrant communities in the northern Virginia and central Virginia regions are also
available.

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