New Data About Immigrants in Northern Virginia: High Housing Costs and Other Challenges, Even Pre-COVID, Despite High Education Levels

RICHMOND, VA -- The diverse immigrant communities of Northern Virginia are woven into the economy and communities. Yet despite most immigrants in the region having high levels of education, household incomes for immigrant families lag those of U.S.-born residents of the region, and incomes for Black and Latinx immigrants particularly lag. This makes it harder to afford Northern Virginia’s high cost of living. Nearly a third of all foreign-born area residents pay more than 30% of their income towards housing costs.

Over 1 in 5 area immigrants work in Northern Virginia 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 lower rates of health coverage than U.S. born residents within Northern Virginia, and this trend is even more pronounced for people who are not citizens.

“Policymakers should work to close health coverage gaps, especially during this pandemic, and address remaining challenges such as lower incomes and high housing costs,” said Laura Goren, Institute Research Director and co-author of the report.

Among the report’s key findings:

- **Immigrants in Northern Virginia are diverse, long-standing pillars of the community**
  - Almost half of foreign-born residents have been here since before 2000.
  - The race, ethnicity, and country of origin of immigrants in the region is diverse -- more than 8 in 10 immigrants in the region are people of color and Northern Virginia immigrants come from all global regions.
  - Over half (56%) of foreign-born residents of Northern Virginia are U.S. citizens.
• **Northern Virginia immigrants are well-educated and work in a variety of fields**
  - Over 1 in 5 area immigrants work in service occupations, meaning many are front-line, essential workers during this pandemic.
  - About 73% of foreign-born immigrants in the region are employed -- slightly higher than the 71% of U.S.-born area residents that are employed.
  - Two-thirds of the foreign-born population in Northern Virginia have attained at least some college education or higher, and almost half have a bachelor’s degree or a professional degree -- far higher rates than for the foreign-born population nationally.

• **Despite high levels of education and high labor force participation, challenges remain**
  - Median income lags behind that of U.S.-born residents, and similar trends emerge within the foreign-born population with the earning of some immigrants of color lagging behind that of white immigrants.
  - Nearly a third of all foreign-born area residents pay more than 30% of their income towards housing costs.
  - Coverage gaps remain -- naturalized foreign-born residents have lower rates of health coverage than U.S. born residents, and this trend is even more pronounced for people who are not citizens.

“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 Northern Virginia Community: A Profile of Our Immigrant Neighbors**,” is available at [www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org](http://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org). A Spanish-language version and reports about immigrant communities in the Hampton Roads and central Virginia regions are also available.

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