

## **What You Should Know: Immigrants and Immigration in Colorado**

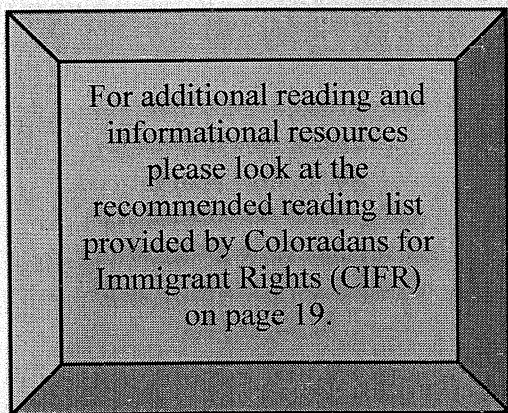
### **FACT #1: Undocumented immigrants would legalize their status if they had the option.**

The vast majority of those in the country without proper immigration status have done so because our immigration system provides no way for them to receive a visa. For instance, while our economy relies on an estimated 485,000 new, low-skilled immigrant workers each year, but our immigration system provides only 5,000 visas (Pew Hispanic Center). That is a huge discrepancy between what our economy needs and what our immigration system allows. Moreover, the wait time for children in other countries to join their parents here legally often exceeds five years. This hardship and unrealistic allotment of work visas is why we way the US immigration system is broken

### **FACT #2: Undocumented immigration is a civil, not criminal, infraction.**

Unlawful presence in the United States is a civil violation of federal law, not a crime. Therefore, undocumented immigration status does not make someone a criminal.

### **FACT #3: Immigration boosts the US economy in a number of ways.**



Immigrants fill numerous, crucial economic niches that support the US market. For instance, immigrant entrepreneurship generates jobs. Immigrants with specialized skills help innovate in key sectors of the economy. Interestingly, immigrants are increasingly associated with further openings to trade and other forms of exchange with other countries. Finally, immigrant workers and their families both produce and consume goods and services, having wide reaching economic impact. (Migration Policy Institute) In fact, a recent

study by the Perryman Group warns of the devastating impact to our economy that a loss of undocumented workers would cause. In Colorado alone it is estimated that if undocumented workers were removed from the state, 40,000 native and authorized immigrant workers would lose their jobs.

### **FACT #4: All immigrants pay taxes, including the undocumented.**

All immigrants, undocumented and documented, pay sales and property taxes in Colorado, contributing to the state's coffers like everyone else. What is more, despite the legal obstacles, the Social Security Administration estimates 75% of undocumented workers pay income taxes. This includes \$7 billion in Social Security and \$1.5 billion in Medicare taxes a year, with little hope of ever receiving benefits (Social Security Administration). By the end of the 2000 tax year, there was \$374 billion in the Social Security Suspense

Fund from undocumented workers. A 2006 Texas study found that undocumented workers contribute considerably more in taxes than they receive in public benefits, on the order of \$400 million a year (Texas Comptroller). A University of Georgia study released in August found that Hispanic buying power in Tennessee has increased 833% since 1990, increasing sales tax contributions and strengthening the overall tax base (University of Georgia).

**FACT #5: Communities with higher rates of immigration actually have less crime.**

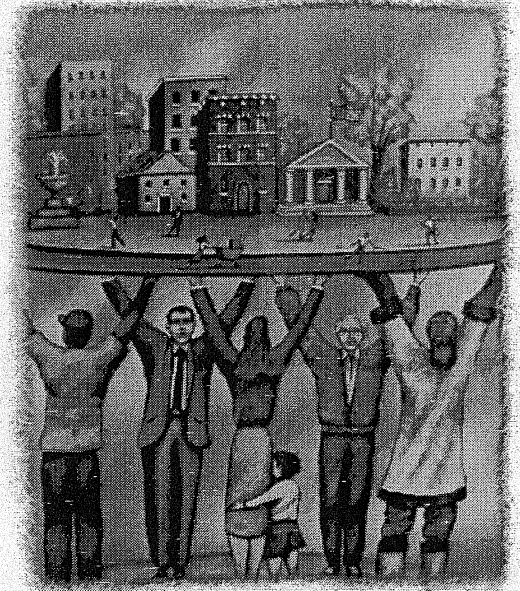
According to U.S. Census data, immigrants have the lowest rates of criminal convictions in American society (Migration Policy Institute). What is more, various studies, including one by Harvard Sociologist Robert J. Sampson, have shown that immigration actually reduces crime in communities, for immigrants and native-born alike.

**FACT #6: Local enforcement of federal immigration law is costly to taxpayers, while reducing safety for both immigrant and native-born communities.**

Effective local law enforcement depends on developing trust with the community, not doing the job of the federal government. The Major Cities Chiefs of Police reject any new role in immigration enforcement because it would compromise their primary mission: to ensure the safety of our communities (MCCP statement on immigration). If the police asked every victim of a crime for immigration papers, immigrant victims would cease to report crimes, making them easy targets, increasing the overall crime rate, and putting every Coloradan at greater risk. State and local attempts to fix a federal problem promise instead to create a patchwork of inconsistent laws across the nation, divide our communities, threaten public safety, and escalate anti-immigrant sentiment and discrimination.

**FACT #7: Immigrants are ineligible for the vast majority of public benefits and do not access them.**

Immigrants have come to Colorado to work, not to get public benefits. Even for lawful permanent residents, there is a five-year waiting period for most state and federal benefits. In 2006, the Colorado legislature passed a bill to keep undocumented immigrants from accessing public benefits for which they are ineligible. Reports have found the state spending several million to enforce the law while saving nothing. This is because ineligible immigrants were not using the services to begin with but implementing a new law always requires overhead. What is more, the new maze of identification requirements makes it harder for our most vulnerable citizens, especially the low income and mentally ill, to access much needed state support systems.





**FACT #8: Today's immigrants want to learn English and are doing so as quickly as immigrants of the past.**

Today's immigrants understand that learning English is vital to full participation in society and take the steps to learn the new language as quickly as possible. Within ten years of arrival, more than 75% of immigrants speak English well. For long-term immigrants, less than 3% are unable to speak English well (National Academy of Sciences). The best way to help immigrants learn English is to enable them to work and interact with native speakers, and to improve ESL programs in public schools and local communities.



## **Get Involved in Welcoming Colorado!**

### **Here is your Menu of Options:**

- A. Build a Base of Support**
- B. Educate and Involve Others  
in Your Community**
- C. Draw Wide Attention to the Issue**
- D. Build Power to Make Change**
- E. Fundraise for Campaign Sustainability**

There are many interesting ways to get involved with Welcoming Colorado, and this initiative is the perfect place for allies to work side by side with immigrants for just communities.

## **BUT FIRST THINGS FIRST: IF YOU ARE NOT AN IMMIGRANT, THINK LIKE AN ALLY!**

Because immigrants are the people most affected by anti-immigrant rhetoric and unjust immigration policies, they are the most equipped to choose how to change things and the most invested in their own liberation. As allies, we can take cues from immigrant-led groups and change the systems that affect our entire communities.

### **Get connected**

Developing meaningful, genuine relationships with immigrants keeps all of our work sharp and relevant. Spend some time getting to know who in your community is working on immigrant justice issues and if there are any immigrant groups already organized. Many immigrant rights groups are members of the statewide organization, the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC), which is a good place to contact. You can also talk to folks in your neighborhood, faith community, or other community organizations to find out who is interested in immigrant rights and immigrant issues.