

Commission says immigrants, illegal and otherwise, have had a positive impact on Maryland

By Associated Press, Published: February 9

BALTIMORE, Md. — A new report highlights the positive impact of foreign-born residents in Maryland and criticizes efforts to deport or deny services to illegal immigrants and their children.

The University of Maryland on Thursday released the report by the Commission to Study the Impact of Immigrants in Maryland. It was prepared for Maryland lawmakers.

While the report notes that some lower-income immigrants and their children may receive more in the way of services than they pay in taxes at times, it encourages lawmakers to take a longer-term view.

“Just because the typical 18 year old is a net cost to society today, does not necessarily mean they are a net fiscal burden over their entire life,” the report said.

Immigrants in Maryland tend to be either highly paid or low-income workers, who mainly complement and don't compete with the existing workforce. The report said both high- and low-paid immigrants are needed and that they have helped support growth in construction, medicine, information technology and farming over the past decade.

“Without the influx of foreign-born workers, expansion in these labor-intensive industries would have been choked off, increasing prices and discouraging growth across the economy,” the report found. “It is doubtful that without immigration, the state could have lured enough U.S.-born workers from slower growing parts of the country to fill these positions.”

The report notes that in suburban Washington, average household income and property values rose rapidly during the same period that unauthorized immigration increased.

Maryland was home to almost 804,000 foreign-born residents in 2010, or 13.9 percent of the population, compared to 12.9 percent of the population nationwide, the report said. It cited a Pew Center estimate that 4.8 percent of the state's population was not authorized to live in the United States.

Montgomery and Prince George's counties accounted for about 60 percent of the state's foreign-born residents with Baltimore city and the counties of Anne Arundel, Baltimore and Howard accounting for most of the remainder.

The commission was authorized by the state legislature in 2008 and formed in 2010 to provide policy analysis and recommendations to state lawmakers on immigration policy, which has become an issue of increasing debate.

Legislation passed last year that would allow illegal immigrants to pay in-state tuition at public colleges under certain conditions has prompted a petition drive against the law by Republican Delegates Neil Parrott and Pat McDonough.

McDonough criticized the report Thursday, saying that panel members are advocates for illegal immigrants and ignored or played down job losses, crime and other costs associated with illegal immigrants.

“They dismiss all of the burdens that are created and all of the programs that are designed to address these questions,” McDonough said. “So, it’s a biased report, there’s no question about that.”

The report also was critical of efforts to deport illegal immigrants, saying that would “have only a very limited benefit.”

Instead, the authors recommended improved education and training programs and greater access to affordable health care. It also said the state must increase efforts to provide superior education to all regardless of immigration status to ensure Maryland’s continued global economic and technical leadership. The children of illegal immigrants are most likely to be part of the labor force for decades, supporting the state and national economy as well as paying into the Social Security and Medicare programs, the report said.

“It would be foolhardy, then, for state and local communities to withhold education and other opportunities from those future workers,” the report said.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/immigrant-impact-commission-report-finds-positive-overall-impact-in-maryland/2012/02/09/gIQAs1aq1Q_story.html