



Bell Policy Center

Immigration effects on Colorado and the nation: A review of research

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Summary

Immigration will be one of the hottest issues facing Colorado in 2006. A group called Defend Colorado Now is working to put an initiative on the 2006 ballot to deny state and local government services to undocumented immigrants.

We believe sound policies grow from thorough, objective research. This report presents the results of the Bell Policy Center's review of existing research on the effects of immigration.

Key findings from the research include:

Demographics

- In 2004, 35.7 million foreign born immigrants lived in the U.S.
- Nationwide, 29 percent or 10.3 million are estimated to be undocumented.
- In 2004, 434,938 foreign born immigrants lived in Colorado, about 10 percent of the state population.
- In Colorado, about half of the state's immigrants, between 200,000 and 250,000 people, are estimated to be undocumented.

Economic impacts

- Immigration drives economic growth in the nation as a whole, adding about \$10 billion to the U.S. economy annually.
- Immigrants come to the U.S. to work. While 83 percent of native-born men work, the rate is 86 percent for documented immigrant men and 90 percent for undocumented immigrant men.
- Wages and employment of native-born U.S. workers are affected minimally by immigration.

State and federal policy

- Immigration is a federal issue. Current immigration laws and policies need to be revised to better meet the needs of our economy.
- Immigrants pay their way. Under most scenarios, immigrants pay more in taxes to all levels of government than they consume in services.
- However, there tends to be a net surplus at the federal level and a net cost to states and localities.
- The costs of implementing proposals to deny government services to undocumented immigrants exceed the savings they generate.

Bell Policy Center's position

Most government spending on documented and undocumented immigrants pays for education and health care for their U.S. born, citizen children. These costs are mandated by federal law and explicitly exempted by the proposed initiative. Documented and undocumented immigrants pay taxes at a rate that covers the costs of the other services they use.

For these reasons the Bell Policy Center opposes the initiative proposed by Defend Colorado Now.

Not only does this proposal cost taxpayers more than it saves, it opens governments up to new litigation liability and creates unnecessary hurdles for legal immigrants and citizens when they seek the government services their taxes pay for.

Our efforts are better directed at modernizing immigration laws and urging the federal government to pay a bigger share of the educational costs for the children of immigrants.

During the coming year, the Bell Policy Center will examine immigration in more depth, focusing on costs and benefits to Colorado, and issue reports on our findings.

To view the complete report, go to www.thebell.org

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