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33 Whitney Avenue
New Haven, CT 06510
Voice: 203-498-4240
Fax: 203-498-4242
www.ctkidslink.org

Contacts: Mary Glassman, J.D., Director of Legislative Affairs, (860) 550-3976
Priscilla Canny, Ph.D., Managing Director, 203-498-4240, (203) 927-6128 (after
3:00)

Report: Immigration Growth Presents Opportunities for Connecticut

***One in eight Connecticut residents was born outside the United States;
immigrant population has grown 61% since 1990***

A report examining new data from the U.S. Census Bureau finds that Connecticut's growing immigrant population will help to counteract what would otherwise be a challenging demographic and economic trend: the aging of the state's population. *Immigration in Connecticut: A Growing Opportunity*, a report from Connecticut Voices for Children, calls for policies that help to remove barriers that prevent the immigrant population from reaching their full potential and making contributions to the state's economy.

"We are more than ever a nation of immigrants," said Priscilla Canny, Managing Director of Connecticut Voices for Children and co-author of the report. "As the population of Connecticut ages, we will rely even more on the contributions of immigrants."

Population trends

One in eight Connecticut residents (12.9% or 452,358 residents) was born outside the United States, according to 2006 Census Bureau estimates from the American Community Survey (ACS). This represents a growth of 61% in the size of Connecticut's foreign-born population since 1990 and a growth of 21% since 2000. Between 1995 and 2025, the number of immigrants in the state is expected to double, with an additional 337,000 people coming to the state through international migration.

Connecticut now has the 11th highest percentage of foreign-born residents in the country. In addition, Connecticut has the largest proportion of residents born in Puerto Rico -- 2.4%. (These Puerto Rican residents are not captured in the foreign-born statistics, since they are U.S. citizens.)

Census data suggest that Connecticut's eight largest cities have had an increase in the number of foreign-born residents in recent years. (2006 data is not available for smaller cities and towns.)

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The origins of the state's foreign-born population have shifted in recent years. In 2000, Europeans made up the largest share of our foreign-born population at 38%, while Latin Americans constituted 35%. In 2006, that ratio had reversed, with 38% of foreign-born residents coming from Latin America and 33% from Europe.

Nearly half (46%) of Connecticut's foreign-born residents are naturalized citizens.

Immigrants help to meet economic challenge

As the baby boomers reach retirement age, the number of

Connecticut elderly residents is projected to grow by 69% between 2000 and 2030. But, according to Connecticut Voices for Children, the growth of a younger immigrant population will help to offset the challenges of an aging population:

- This population growth will expand the labor pool, assuring Connecticut's economy a more adequate workforce.
- This increasing immigrant workforce will expand the tax base, shoring up the revenues necessary to support publicly-funded services for a growing elderly population, including health and long-term care.
- The language skills of Connecticut's immigrants, along with their established ties to dozens of countries, will be strong competitive assets for the state in a global economy.

Overcoming challenges

While the growth of immigrant workers can be a boon to Connecticut's economy, these immigrants also face challenges:

- **Immigrants, although they are as likely to be employed as native-born workers, are more likely to work in lower-wage jobs.** Foreign-born residents are about as likely to be employed as native-born residents (69% of immigrants are in the workforce, compared to 68% of native-born residents). Yet, while 27% of Connecticut's native-born, full time, year-round workers earned less than \$35,000, 43% of Connecticut immigrants earned less than this level of income. Overall, foreign-born residents are not much more likely to be in poverty (9% of foreign-born residents, compared to 8% of native-born).
- **Immigrant families face language barriers at school and work.** One in eight Connecticut children in K-12 schools live in homes where English is not the primary language. In some towns, the proportion is much greater, with Hartford (47%), New Britain (43%), and Bridgeport (39%) having the highest rates.

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| Percentage of Population that is Foreign-Born by Town | | |
|---|------------|----------------------|
| Town | 2000 (%) | 2006 % (Number) |
| Bridgeport | 21% | 26% (35,826) |
| Danbury | 27% | 34% (26,667) |
| Hartford | 19% | 21% (24,941) |
| New Britain | 18% | 23% (16,586) |
| New Haven | 12% | 17% (21,579) |
| Norwalk | 20% | 26% (20,699) |
| Stamford | 30% | 32% (37,210) |
| Waterbury | 12% | 10% (10,681) |
| Connecticut | 11% | 13% (452,358) |
| Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000 and ACS 2006 Table: B05002 | | |

Importantly, most children of immigrants are citizens, even if their parents are not. Children born in the United States to foreign-born parents are automatically United States citizens, regardless of their parents' citizenship status. In fact, nationwide, 75 percent of all children of immigrants are in "mixed status" families in which parents are not citizens, but the children are. Because so many families are mixed status, policies that make some foreign-born residents ineligible for public programs can often hurt large numbers of children who are U.S. citizens.

To help meet the increasing demand for a skilled and educated workforce, Connecticut Voices for Children called on policy makers to address barriers that prevent the immigrant population from reaching their full potential and making contribution to the state's economy:

- Expanding English language programs for foreign-born children and their parents.
- Assuring that information about state-funded programs and services for which this population may be eligible is communicated in multiple languages.
- Expanding training and employment opportunities for immigrant parents.
- Increasing state funding to school districts with a disproportionate share of immigrant children to help them address the students' unique educational needs.

"Immigrants are a tremendous resource and provide a competitive advantage for Connecticut's economy," said Mary Glassman, Director of Legislative Affairs at Connecticut Voices for Children. "However, to achieve this promise, Connecticut must find ways to better support the children of immigrant families so they can reach their full potential."

Connecticut Voices for Children is a statewide, research-based policy and advocacy organization committed to promoting leadership, policy change, and investment on behalf of all of Connecticut's children and youth. The report, *Immigration in Connecticut: A Growing Opportunity*, is available online at www.ctkidslink.org.

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