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

Contacts: Doug Hall, Ph.D., Associate Director of Research, 203-498-4240, x115
Priscilla Canny, Ph.D., Director of Research, 203-498-4240, x104
Shelley Geballe, J.D., MPH, President, 203-498-4240, x106

Report Finds High Immigration Growth in Connecticut Helps Counteract Challenges of Aging Population

***One in ten Connecticut residents was born outside the United States;
Number of immigrant residents expected to double by 2025***

***Tuesday public hearing reviews bill that would help
prevent the “brain drain” of young immigrants from the state***

On the eve of a public hearing on legislation that would enable more young Connecticut immigrants to attend public universities in the state, a new report finds that Connecticut’s growing population of immigrants will help to counteract what would otherwise be a troublesome demographic and economic trend: the state’s aging population. These and other findings are summarized in “Immigration in Connecticut,” a report from Connecticut Voices for Children that summarizes a wealth of state and local data on immigrants.

One in ten Connecticut residents (11% or 367,967 residents) was born outside the United States – the 13th highest percentage in the nation, according to the 2000 Census. An additional 2.7% were born in Puerto Rico. Moreover, 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. This expected growth in the number of international immigrants is the 12th greatest among the 50 states and District of Columbia.

As the baby boomers reach retirement age, the number of Connecticut elderly residents is projected to grow -- by 44% between 1995 and 2025. However, a more youthful immigrant population will help offset the potential challenges of an aging population in three ways, according to Connecticut Voices for Children:

- This population growth will expand the labor pool, assuring Connecticut’s economy a more adequately sized workforce.
- The increasing immigrant workforce will help 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.

The report also finds that most children of immigrants are citizens – even if their parents are not. Children born in the United States to foreign born parents are automatically U.S. 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.

“We are more than ever a nation of immigrants,” said Priscilla Canny, Director of Research at 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.”

The report is released on the eve of a Tuesday public hearing on legislation that would allow certain young immigrants who are Connecticut residents and who graduate from local high schools to pay in-state tuition at state universities. Currently, these students must pay much higher out-of state rates, providing an incentive for high-achieving young residents to leave the state and pursue higher education and employment elsewhere. The public hearing of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement will take place Tuesday, March 1, 2005 at 11:00 a.m. in Room 2A of the Legislative Office Building. The bill, HB 6793, An Act Concerning Access to Postsecondary Education, would let young immigrants pay in-state tuition rates if they its meet residency and educational requirements.

“Immigrants are a tremendous resource for Connecticut’s economy and can provide us with an important competitive advantage in this global economy,” said Doug Hall, Associate Director of Research at Connecticut Voices for Children. “However, to achieve this promise, Connecticut must support the children of immigrant families so they can reach their full potential.”

“By requiring some immigrant youth who are Connecticut residents to pay higher tuition, we are pushing some of our smartest kids out of the state,” said Shelley Geballe, President of Connecticut Voices for Children. “If we want our economy to thrive, we can’t afford that kind of brain drain.”

Some cities and towns are home to a disproportionately high number of foreign born residents, particularly Stamford (30% foreign born), Danbury (27%), Bridgeport (21%), Norwalk (20%), Greenwich (19%), Hartford 19%, New Britain (18%), Bloomfield (18%), and East Hartford (15%). The top countries of origin for foreign-born Connecticut residents are Jamaica, Italy, Poland, Canada, United Kingdom, India, Mexico, Portugal, China & Taiwan, and Columbia.

Among other findings in the report:

- **Foreign born residents are nearly as likely to be employed as native-born residents (63% of immigrants are in the workforce, compared to 64% of native-born residents).** Of those who are in the workforce, a greater percentage of immigrants (46.1%) work full-time year round, as compared to native born residents (43.5%). **However, immigrants are more likely to work in low wage jobs.** While 9% of Connecticut’s full time, year-round workers earned less than \$20,000, 15% of Connecticut immigrants earned less than \$20,000.
- **Language barriers are one of the difficulties immigrant families and their children face at school and work.** One in ten Connecticut children in K-12 schools live in homes

where English is not the primary language. In some towns, the proportion is even greater, including Hartford (52%), New Britain (40%), and Bridgeport (38%).

- **Children and parents who were born in Puerto Rico make up a substantial proportion of the population in many Connecticut cities.** As of the 2000 Census, 90,500 Connecticut residents were born in Puerto Rico (2.7%). Among all the states, Connecticut has the highest proportion of its population (5.7%) that is of Puerto Rican heritage. This larger proportion (5.7%) includes those who have identified themselves as being of Hispanic – Puerto Rican heritage regardless of their place of birth. Although children and parents who were born in Puerto Rico are United States citizens, they share many important characteristics with immigrant groups such as cultural differences, language difficulties and a greater share of low wage work.

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*, is available online at www.ctkidslink.org.

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