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## **Rhode Island Can Strengthen Its Economy and Communities Through Inclusive Policies for Immigrants**

**Providence, RI** — State and local policymakers can take key steps to better integrate immigrants, including immigrants who are undocumented, into the mainstream economy and foster community well-being, according to a [new report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#). Giving all residents access to economic opportunity would enable them to earn higher wages, spend more at businesses, and contribute more in taxes that are used to fund schools and other investments that are critical to a strong economy, the report finds. Harsh anti-immigrant policies, in contrast, harm workers and their children and likely weaken the economy.

“At a time when federal immigration policies are causing widespread harm, it is both sound policy and beneficial to states to pursue supportive policies that assuage fears and provide opportunity for *all* of their residents — regardless of their national origin, their religion, the color of their skin, or the language they speak,” Senior Policy Analyst Eric Figueroa of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities explained.

The report reviews states’ policies in four key areas that support undocumented residents’ economic well-being: driver’s licenses, in-state tuition and state financial aid for college students, stronger labor law enforcement, and health coverage for all children.

“The Rhode Island Immigrant Coalition has been advocating for driver’s licenses for our undocumented neighbors for over ten years,” said Hannah Toriz Perez, the Coalition’s coordinator. “The report supports what we have been saying — not only is it important for immigrants to have a license to help them get better jobs and care for their children, but we are all safer if everyone who drives has a license, and we all benefit from reduced insurance premiums. Fourteen states plus Puerto Rico and D.C. allow immigrants to get driver’s licenses regardless of their status. We will continue to advocate to make Rhode Island the fifteenth state.”

Twenty-one states plus DC have inclusive higher education policies for immigrants. All of these states and DC have, adopted “tuition equity” laws and 12 of these states plus D.C. offer state financial aid to undocumented students. Rhode Island has implemented “tuition equity” for undocumented students under a policy enacted by the Board of Governors for Higher Education in 2011. A student who attended a Rhode Island high school for three or more years and who graduated from a high school or attained a high school equivalency diploma can pay in-state tuition at the three state higher-education schools.

Efforts to enact the policy into state law, as is the case in all but 4 of the states, have not yet been successful.

“Undocumented residents make a sizeable contribution to our state’s economy and finances as well as to our local communities, contributing over \$31 million in annual state and local taxes,” noted Linda Katz,” Policy Director at the Economic Progress Institute. “We know that so many immigrants are living in fear because of a number of federal policy changes, foregoing benefits that they may need to support themselves and their families. This report is most welcome in showing that taking action at the state level can not only improve life for our undocumented neighbors but is critical to improving our collective health and well-being.”

**About The Economic Progress Institute**

The Economic Progress Institute is a nonpartisan research and policy organization dedicated to improving the economic well-being of low- and modest-income Rhode Islanders. For more information visit [www.economicprogressri.org](http://www.economicprogressri.org).

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