

Role of immigrants important for state economy, says report

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TRENTON New Jersey's economy is dependent upon the contribution of immigrants, according to a report released Monday showing that foreign-born people make up 28 percent of the state's workforce. These same immigrants bring in almost a quarter of the earnings statewide and own nearly 20 percent of the state's businesses.

In a nutshell: Immigrants make New Jersey run, according to the report.

"Immigrants in New Jersey are a key part of our economy and it's impossible to imagine our economy functioning without them," said Rutgers University Economics Professor Ira N. Gang, who co-authored the report with his colleague Anne Morrison Piehl.

The 20-page report, released by the Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics Program on Immigration and Democracy, comes as a panel created by Gov. Jon S. Corzine prepares to release recommendations to better incorporate the state's 1.7 million immigrants into the larger community. As the state moves to make changes, the report authors say officials must look at the factors that distinguish the Garden State and its immigrants from others across the country.

"Simple extrapolation of the national debate would not be appropriate for setting policy in New Jersey," said Piehl.

For example, New Jersey's foreign-born workers tend to be highly-educated more than in other states and the specialized skills they hold make immigrants "indispensible" to the state's reputation as a center of innovation and technology, the authors wrote.

Shai Goldstein, New Jersey Immigration Policy Network executive director, attended the Statehouse event in which the report was released Monday. He pointed to the health care industry as an example of the contribution made by foreign-born workers. At least 40 percent of physicians, nursing aides, orderlies and attendants are immigrants, according to the report.

"The entire range of health care in this state is dependent upon immigrants," Goldstein said. "Without immigrants, our health care system would be in great danger."...