

## **Republican Perspective**

**28 March 2018**

**by John Littig**

### **“Welfare Use by Immigrant and Native Households”**

We are often told by pundits, immigration advocates, and the news media that immigrants use our welfare system less than native-born Americans and that they are, as a group, a net contribution rather than a drain on the nation’s resources. Are these assertions true?

The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) has published an extensive report called “Welfare Use by Immigrant and Native Households.” The report relies on data from the Census Bureau’s Survey of Income and Program Participation.

The report compares households headed by an immigrant (legal or illegal) with those headed by native-born. The report uses the terms immigrant and foreign-born synonymously, and explains that foreign-born includes all who were not U.S. citizens at birth, including naturalized citizens, green card holders, illegal immigrants, and those on long-term visas such as foreign students. The report includes as welfare: cash, food, and housing programs and Medicaid. Most of the data are for the year 2012.

CIS says it is “an independent, non-partisan, non-profit, research organization.” Its mission is “providing immigration policymakers, the academic community, news media, and concerned citizens with reliable information about the social, economic, security, and fiscal consequences of legal and illegal immigration...” You can find CIS and the report at [cis.org](http://cis.org).

The report includes extensive use of statistics in chart and table formats. Here, in abbreviated form, are some of the highlights of the data.

*In 2012, 51 percent of immigrant-headed households used at least one welfare program compared with 30 percent for native-born.*

*Welfare use is high for both new arrivals and well-established immigrants. Of those who had been in the U.S. for more than two decades, 48 percent still accessed welfare.*

*Welfare use varies by immigration source. Those with the highest welfare use came from Mexico and Central America (73 percent), the Caribbean (51 percent), and Africa*

*(48 percent). Only those from Europe (26 percent) and the Indian sub-continent (17 percent) had lower use than native-born (30 percent).*

*Many immigrants struggle to support their children, but even immigrant households without children have significantly higher welfare use (30 percent) than native households without children (20 percent).*

*In 2012, 76 percent of households headed by an immigrant who had not graduated from high school accessed welfare, as did 63 percent of those with only a high school education.*

*Of immigrant households, 24 percent are headed by someone who has not completed high school, compared to 8 percent of households headed by native-born.*

*The high rates of immigrant welfare use are not entirely explained by their lower education levels. Households headed by a college-educated immigrant had much higher (26 percent) welfare use than those headed by college educated native-born (13 percent).*

*In addition to having higher welfare use, immigrant households pay less in taxes to the federal government on average than do native-born households. For every dollar that native households pay in income and payroll taxes, immigrant households pay 89 cents.*

We also are often told that immigrants, especially illegals, are legally barred from accessing the welfare systems. The report deals extensively with that issue. Here's a brief summary: *Most new legal immigrants are barred from welfare programs when they first arrive, as are illegal immigrants. But the ban does not apply to all programs; most legal immigrants have been in the U.S. long enough to qualify for at least some programs, and the bar often does not apply to children; States often independently provide welfare to new immigrants; naturalizing makes immigrants eligible for all programs; and, most important, immigrants (including illegals) can receive benefits on behalf of their U.S.-born children.*

And, the report adds, some provisions restricting immigrant use of welfare are entirely unenforced.

It is important to recognize that the report addresses only immigrants' use of welfare programs. It does not address whether or to what extent welfare programs play a role as an immigration magnet. It does not deal at all with other important issues such as

immigrant versus native-born crime rates, immigration's financial and social effects on our public schools, or the overall cultural and societal impacts of immigration.

The report, which is based on Census Bureau data, only answers the immigrant-use-of-welfare issue---and convincingly. And it bolsters the case for immigration reform and a merit-based system.