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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Report Finds that Worcester's Foreign-Born  
Are Major Economic Contributors**

*UMass report finds local immigrants play a large and critical role in the local economy and are more likely to be entrepreneurs, but face unique challenges*

Today the Seven Hills Foundation released a comprehensive report examining the challenges and economic contributions of Worcester's foreign-born residents. Commissioned by Seven Hills Foundation and prepared by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from the Public Policy Center (PPC) at UMass Dartmouth in collaboration with the UMass Donahue Institute, the report was made possible by the generous financial support of the Trustees of the George F. & Sybil H. Fuller Foundation; the Stoddard Charitable Trust; and the Fletcher Foundation.

"Having such extreme viewpoints about an issue as important as immigration clouds our ability to develop sound policy and workable strategies that support families and communities. It is my sincere desire that public officials, students, advocacy and service organizations, the general public, and others interested in better understanding the dynamics surrounding our foreign-born populations in Worcester may use this document as a source of information and reflection," stated Dr. David Jordan, President of the Seven Hills Foundation, which commissioned the report.

Based in Worcester, Seven Hills Foundation, one of the largest health and human services providers in New England, currently offers program sites at 170 locations throughout Massachusetts, Rhode Island and eight countries abroad. Seven Hills Foundation and its clinical affiliates employ nearly 3,800 professionals. Many of these employees are foreign-born and represent 43 different home countries.

Entitled, *“The Foreign Born Population in Worcester: Assessing the Challenges and Contributions of a Diverse Community”*, the report profiles the foreign-born population in Worcester and highlights their unique challenges and contributions. The analysis also focuses on the impact the children of the foreign-born have on the public education system, and provides a detailed description of Worcester’s largest foreign-born subpopulations. Qualitative interviews with immigration service providers detail the challenges of supporting communities of refugees and other immigrants endeavoring to make a life for themselves and their families in Worcester.

“Our research finds that the City of Worcester benefits in a number of important ways from its immigrant community,” noted Professor Michael D. Goodman, Executive Director of the Public Policy Center (PPC) at UMass Dartmouth. “Significantly, foreign born residents represent 21 percent of the population but are 37 percent of Worcester’s small business owners. And foreign-born workers fill critical gaps in the region’s STEM workforce and have helped to position Worcester for economic success,” Goodman added.

The report clearly demonstrates that Worcester’s foreign-born population cannot be thought of as a homogenous group “The diversity of Worcester’s foreign-born population should not be simply defined in terms of country of origin or cultural background, as there is also a great deal of socioeconomic diversity both across and within groups of foreign-born residents in Worcester,” noted Christina Citino, a senior researcher with the UMass Donahue Institute. She further explained that “Worcester-area service providers felt that recognizing and understanding the population’s diversity is a critical step to dispelling the many myths and misconceptions about Worcester’s foreign-born residents.”

Specifically, the report finds that:

Worcester’s foreign born contribute to the economy in various ways, with significant impacts resulting from their role as producers (i.e. workers and business owners) and as consumers of local goods and services. Foreign-born business owners and consumers make disproportionately large contributions to the local economy.

- Foreign-born entrepreneurs account for 37 percent of all business owners in Worcester, double the statewide rate. Historically, immigrant entrepreneurs are

more likely to own neighborhood-based businesses such as restaurants, groceries, and retail stores.

- Foreign-born adults are more likely than natives to have earned a degree in key STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, or healthcare).
- Foreign-born workers collectively earn \$947 million annually, which represents 26 percent of the nearly \$3.7 billion in total earnings citywide.
- Worcester's foreign born spent an estimated \$472 million in the local economy in 2015. These consumer expenditures resulted in an estimated \$715 million in local economic output (sales), \$256 million in new labor income, all of which supported an estimated 5,695 jobs in the Greater Worcester economy (defined as Worcester proper and contiguous communities).

The continual flow of immigrants into Worcester from different parts of the world lends a level of diversity in the foreign-born population that makes Worcester unique when compared with the state or other Gateway Cities.

- Worcester is home to an estimated 37,970 immigrants from 85 countries, which make up 21 percent of the city's total population. This compares to 15 percent statewide.
- The majority of Worcester's current foreign-born residents entered the country after 1990.
- The largest concentrations of foreign-born residents hail from Ghana (10 percent of all foreign born), the Dominican Republic (10 percent), Vietnam (9 percent), Brazil (6 percent), and Albania (5 percent).
- Over half (51 percent) of Worcester's foreign born are not US citizens while 49 percent are naturalized US citizens. Most naturalized citizens gained citizenship between 2000 and 2010.
- Among noncitizens in Worcester, there are an estimated 5,500 unauthorized immigrants.
- The Department of State reported 2,196 refugee arrivals in Worcester between 2007 and 2012.
- An estimated 70 percent of all Asians and 46 percent of all Africans in Worcester are foreign-born. Comparatively, 24 percent of all Hispanics, and 12 percent of all white residents are foreign-born.

The size of the ELL student population in Worcester has increased dramatically in recent years. The vast majority English language learners in Worcester were born in the US and have varying levels of English proficiency. Worcester Public Schools offers a variety of ELL programs in order to address the unique challenges of this student population.

- ELL students in Worcester Public Schools increased from 13.5 percent to 35.1 percent of all Worcester public school students between 2004 and 2015. Statewide, the ELL student population grew from 5.0 percent to 8.5 percent of all students during the same period.
- In FY16, ELL students will cost the Worcester Public Schools an average of \$9,303 per pupil as compared to non-ELL students which are expected to cost between \$6,942 and \$8,657 per student.
- Overall, one third of all children in Worcester have at least one foreign-born parent. Most children of the foreign born are U.S.-born, and 17 percent of Worcester's children have at least one parent who was born outside of the U.S.
- The vast majority (95 percent) of English Language Learners was born in the U.S.; Ghana is the second most common country of origin, but it accounts for only 1.8 percent of all ELL students.
- Of the 85 different languages spoken by ELL students in Worcester, Spanish is the most common followed by Vietnamese. Other major languages include Albanian, Twi, Arabic, Portuguese, Patios, and Nepali.
- Worcester has an ELL student-to-teacher ratio of 62:1, compared with the statewide ratio of 40:1.

Many of the foreign born, especially noncitizens, are of prime working age (25-44 years old) and actively participate in the workforce. Economically, naturalized immigrants as a group fare better than both natives and noncitizens, while noncitizens are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than natives or naturalized immigrants.

- Worcester's foreign born are almost two times more likely than natives to be ages 25 to 44, with this age cohort accounting for 42 percent of immigrants. This compares to 24 percent of natives.
- Naturalized foreign-born residents have the highest median household income (\$50,865) of all groups— measured against native households (\$46,263) and noncitizen households (\$37,944)

- ❑ Naturalized foreign-born residents have the highest rates of home ownership (53 percent) in Worcester as compared to natives (46 percent) and noncitizens (19 percent).
- ❑ Despite having the highest average number of workers per household, noncitizen households earn considerably less than native and other foreign-born households, and are most likely to live in poverty.
- ❑ More than half of immigrants in Worcester have low English proficiency. English proficiency correlates with earnings – on average, those with high proficiency earn \$15,000 more per year than those with low proficiency.
- ❑ Analysis of public benefit usage rates reveals that the foreign-born access public benefits at rates equal to or below those of the native born.
- ❑ Health insurance enrollment is high for all groups; 96 percent of natives and 91 percent of foreign-born residents have health insurance. Use of publicly supported health insurance (Medicaid/MassHealth) is slightly higher for native residents. Noncitizens have the highest concentration of uninsured individuals.

Many new immigrants face similar challenges, such as securing access to healthcare, finding affordable housing, and entering the workforce or education systems. However, a comparative analysis of Worcester’s major foreign-born subpopulations revealed that regional groups differ significantly with respect to various social and economic indicators.

- ❑ Labor force participation is extremely high among foreign-born African (88 percent) and Latin American (77 percent) groups, compared with Asians (65 percent), Europeans (61 percent) and Worcester overall (64 percent).
- ❑ Educational attainment is higher for foreign-born residents of European origin (44 percent) than for Worcester overall (38 percent) and lower for residents of Latin American origin (21 percent).
- ❑ English proficiency is higher among foreign-born residents from Africa (89 percent) and Europe (81 percent) than for Asian (63 percent) and Latin American (61 percent) immigrants; citywide proficiency is 79 percent
- ❑ Medicaid/MassHealth enrollment is lower for foreign born Africans (26 percent) and Europeans (21 percent) than for Asians (37 percent) and Latin Americans (50 percent); citywide enrollment is 34 percent
- ❑ Median annual individual income is highest for Africans (\$28,222) and lowest for Latin Americans (\$20,454), whereas the citywide annual median is \$23,202.

- Poverty rates are lower among the foreign born than citywide, except for Latin Americans (23 percent) who match the citywide poverty rate and have a slight majority (53 percent) at or below 200 percent of poverty.

“Since Worcester first began accepting the refugees of the Armenian genocide over one-hundred years ago, our City has been a place where people can come and build a new life,” said Mayor Joseph M. Petty. “This study provides a firm response to those who would say that our City does not benefit from its diversity.”

“If these clearly measured results are true for Worcester, then one could reasonably project similar results in Lowell, New Bedford, the Cape and elsewhere throughout Massachusetts where Seven Hills operates. The evidence is clear – immigrants, in general, benefit our Massachusetts economy and bring specific benefit to Seven Hills Foundation,” concluded Dr. Jordan.

The full report can be accessed at:

<http://www.sevenhills.org/uploads/ForeignBornStudy.pdf>

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