

Editorial: Immigrants are key to Mass. political, economic power

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Among the many takeaways for Massachusetts from the latest once-in-a-decade Census data released this week is that one of the biggest factors helping the state hold onto political power at the federal level is immigration.

The dynamic is not new: We reported last year that from 2010 to 2018, Massachusetts had lost over 184,000 more residents to other parts of the U.S. than it had picked up, based on annual estimates. While the state's overall population has grown along with the rest of the U.S., allowing us to hold onto our Congressional seats, it's slower growth than most of the rest of the country.

Data from the Migration Policy Institute shows that foreign-born residents have disproportionately supported population growth and labor demands in Massachusetts, going from 12.2% of the state's total population in 2000 to 17.3% in 2019.

Not only is the growth of our immigrant population making up one-fifth of the Bay State's labor pool today, but also it's one of the fastest-growing segments keeping the state from falling further behind the rates of expansion of other states, particularly states in the South.

If Massachusetts wants to hold onto its political power over the next decade, and companies want to continue to be able to tap local talent for the high-paying science and technology jobs that have fueled our economy over the past several decades, then rolling out the welcome mat for immigrants is the clearest way to do that. Lawmakers on Capitol Hill can continue to work toward creating a path to citizenship for immigrants, while at the state level, pending bills such as the Safe Communities Act send a clear message that Massachusetts welcomes all.

But absent changes in the law, there's plenty of power that business leaders have in encouraging the continued growth in the state's immigrant population. Our universities and research institutions have long been a destination for students and researchers from overseas, and continuing to invest in higher education and scientific research is more than a noble goal — it's an economic imperative. Local business and policy leaders must continue to lobby for the H-1B visa program, and the clearing of the red tape holding back high-paying workers critical to the growth of our innovation economy.

Meanwhile, from a workforce perspective, all kinds of industries, from retail to hospitality to tourism are struggling to attract workers back as the economy opens up. Nonprofit organizations such as the Immigrant Learning Center and English for New Bostonians, which support newcomers to the state by teaching them English, are working to strengthen the existing immigrant community and their pathways to work and community; they deserve support.

Let this week's Census results serve as yet another reminder that supporting immigrants is not simply a moral duty. It's one of the best ways Massachusetts has for holding onto our economic success and our national political stature in face of the population shifts going on at the national level.

<https://www.bizjournals.com/boston/news/2021/04/29/immigrants-are-key-to-mass-influence-growth.html>