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Report Takes Aim at Immigrant Myths

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At least \$47 million in taxes are paid to the state of New Mexico each year by undocumented immigrant workers, according to a report released Thursday by New Mexico Voices for Children.

Gerry Bradley, an economist and research director with Voices for Children, said he prepared the report to help dispel myths about the state's undocumented immigrant community.

The report tracks the money undocumented immigrants pay the state in gross receipts and property taxes, as well as how much the state pays to educate the children of undocumented immigrants.

The report concludes that undocumented immigrants pay between \$1.2 million and \$1.8 million more in taxes than the state spends educating their children.

"Every K-12 pupil enrolled in school does cost the public education system," Bradley said. "But the taxes they pay offset those costs."

One of the "myths" Bradley tried to dispel in the report, he said, is that undocumented immigrants are tapping into other federal and state resources.

Federal law, the report states, prohibits undocumented immigrants from receiving other taxpayer-funded government services— including Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Social Security, child-care subsidies and housing assistance.

Representatives of immigrant-rights groups, including Somos Un Pueblo Unido and El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos, spoke in support of the report's findings during a New Mexico Voices for Children news conference.

Rachel LaZar, director of El Centro de Igualdad, said, "Although I believe most of New Mexico recognizes the contributions undocumented immigrants make to our state, myths— like they drain the system, don't pay taxes or don't invest in our local economies— still prevail and hold us back from honest dialogue. Those myths are completely false.

"Undocumented immigrants do help grow our economy and fill jobs needed to be filled," she said. "This report is an important first step in moving beyond myths and recognizing the many other ways immigrants contribute economically."