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Report says illegal workers not so hard on economy

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DES MOINES — Illegal immigrants aren't putting too much pressure on the state's financial resources, and they pay nearly as much in taxes while getting fewer government services, according to a new report.

“I think a lot of Iowans assume that undocumented immigrants pay no taxes, and may be surprised to learn that they pay \$40 million to \$60 million in taxes to the state each year,” said Beth Pearson, co-author of the Iowa Policy Project report.

It says an average family of illegal immigrants in Iowa has annual income of about \$27,400, and estimates it pays \$1,253.72 per year in sales and excise tax, \$306.50 in income tax and \$111 in property tax.

That's a total tax payment of \$1,671.22, and 80 percent of the taxes paid by an average family in Iowa, the report said.

Though they pay taxes, illegal immigrants are ineligible for most state and federal benefits including unemployment and health benefits, child care assistance and in-state tuition at the state's public colleges and universities. They are able to get kindergarten through 12th grade education for children and emergency health care and food aid.

Craig Halverson, of Griswold, is the state director for the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps in Iowa. He said regardless of whether they pay taxes or not, “they shouldn't be here. It's against the law.”

The report said illegal immigrants cost the state about \$107.4 million per year, or \$37 per legal resident, and that the cost of providing services for them is far less than the taxes they provide.

The numbers of illegal immigrants living in Iowa ranges between 2 percent and 3 percent of the population — or between 55,000 and 85,000 people, according to a 2006 study by the Pew Hispanic Center.

The center estimates that half are paying taxes while the other half are working for cash, Pearson said.

Iowa Policy Project said if more illegal immigrants worked on the books, or if the state cracked down on employers paying cash, much more tax revenue could be collected.