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State population growth increases for first time since recession began

STAFF REPORT • JANUARY 28, 2010

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CHARLOTTESVILLE — The rate of population growth in Virginia is increasing again for the first time since the beginning of the recession, according to the latest estimates from the Demographics and Workforce Group of the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

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The Cooper Center's population estimates are the official figures for the commonwealth of Virginia. The estimates are based on changes since 2000 in the housing stock, school enrollment, births, exemptions claimed on state income tax returns and drivers' licenses. They are used by state and local government agencies in revenue sharing, funding allocations, and planning and budgeting.

While economic conditions remain uncertain, the population growth rate has recovered from less than 1 percent in 2006-07 and 2007-08 to 1.12 percent in 2008-09, said U.Va. demographer Mike Spar, who prepared the annual population estimates. While the state's overall growth rate has not yet returned to previous levels – it was 1.29 percent in 2003-04 – the trend is toward higher rates of growth after the mid-decade slowdown, he said.

Virginia's population has grown by more than 800,000 since the 2000 census – a growth rate of 11.4 percent over nine years. The provisional state population estimate is 7,882,590, which represents an increase of more than 87,000 since 2008.

Population growth in Virginia occurs through a balance of natural increase (more births than deaths) and net in-migration (more people moving in to Virginia than moving out), he explained. As recently as 2003-04, these two factors contributed in almost equal measure to state population increases; however, the balance between the two has tipped in recent years toward a greater contribution by natural increase.

"It is likely that economic conditions led to a reduction in migration to Virginia," Spar said. "Mobility is

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