The out-migration of Michigan residents from the state is an “urgent public policy issue” that is based more on the state’s economic condition than any other factor and cannot be viewed lightly, says a memo from the Midland-based Mackinac Center for Public Policy.

Where the state demographer said data from United Van Lines needs to be viewed in a larger context and is more nuanced than people simply leaving the state, a response from Michael Hicks, an econometrician contracted by the Mackinac Center, says in fact the shift in population is a “catastrophe of remarkable proportions.”

The state’s “diaspora” is due partly to older people retiring to warmer climates, Mr. Hicks said, but mostly because people are seeking out better economic climates in other states.

The response follows the annual study by United Van Lines, released last week, of which states show the most in-migration - in the 2006 study it was North Carolina - and the states with the most out-migration - in 2006 it was Michigan and North Dakota - based on the moves made by the company’s clients. United Van Lines said 66 percent of its clients from Michigan were moving out of the state and not in.

State Demographer Kenneth Darga responded with a memo to state officials saying the UVL data was skewed by the degree of market share the company had in each state. He also said the American Community Survey from the U.S. Census Bureau indicated the ratio of people moving out of the state compared to those moving in was not so extreme.

The state actually did better with younger people, with a slightly smaller ratio of them moving out than in, and worse with people in the mid-’50s to mid-’60s. Some of the migration of those older people are retirees, but others are those looking for work.

In his responding memo for the Mackinac Center, Mr. Hicks, an associate professor of economics at the Air Force Institute of Technology at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, said that while the UVL annual study - which the company has released for 30 years - was not perfect, it is a national company so charges that its data is skewed on basis of market share was not correct.

He also argued that a better federal statistical gauge of migration is data from the Internal Revenue Service which instead of calling people, as the Census Bureau does, compares addresses of taxpayers by matching their past returns and then publishes that data.

According to the 2005 IRS data, Mr. Hicks said, some 77,000 families left Michigan for other states and were replaced by about 55,000 coming into the state.

“This is a HUGE deficit. Roughly one in each fifty Michigan families leave each year, and even if we count their replacements, each year we lose more than one in two hundred families permanently,” he wrote.

When the UVL study first came out, the Mackinac Center, which favors limited government and has argued the state would promote greater economic growth by not replacing the Single Business Tax when it expires on December 31, warned that the state could make out-migration worse if it sought to boost taxes.