

DC Residents Should Speak Up to Oppose Trump's Proposed "Public Charge" Rule Targeting Immigrants and Their Families

By Amy Lieber

The Trump administration recently proposed a rule to make it much harder for immigrants who are lawfully in the U.S. to remain here—and for immigrants seeking legal entry to come here. The rule would create an immigration system designed for the wealthy and lead many immigrants and their families to forgo assistance they need to survive and make ends meet.

The rule is still in the proposal phase; comments opposing the rule change can be submitted through December 10 at www.regulations.gov.

The proposed rule officially broadens the situations in which an immigrant can be deemed a "public charge," or someone likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsistence. Under the current rules, only cash benefits or use of long-term government care count towards public charge. The Trump proposal would broaden that to also count use of many nutrition, health, and housing assistance programs against someone. The rule covers programs widely used by families that work but do not earn much, including Medicaid.

The result of these changes would be staggering. In the District, the percent of non-citizens at risk of being labeled a "public charge" will rise from 1 percent to 32 percent.¹

An immigrant can avoid the "public charge" designation if they earn more than 250 percent of the federal poverty level. The message is clear: a good immigrant is a wealthy immigrant.

This rule will disproportionately be used against non-white people. "An immigration official may assume that any individual person of color is likelier to have low income, and might deem them a "public charge" without fairly considering all factors,"² according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

This proposed change would likely have a chilling effect: people concerned by the rule, even those who would not be impacted, may stop receiving public benefits, or won't apply when they need them. The resulting confusion and fear will mean that immigrants who are in the U.S. legally will forgo the assistance they need.³ For example, entire families (including citizens) may cancel benefits although the new definition only applies to an individual. In the District, 15,000 children are at risk of losing needed services because they live with a non-citizen that would be affected.⁴

This proposal impacts not just immigrants and their families, but also the communities they live in. The benefits that immigrants may stop collecting, for fear of being considered a "public charge," help the local economy. For example, every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates as much \$1.70 in local economic activity.⁵ If 25 percent of eligible immigrants give up benefits like SNAP, the District would lose \$43 million in federal funds, with ripple effects adding up to \$84 million and hundreds of job losses.⁶

This is one of many harmful immigration policies introduced by the current administration. Like family separation practices and the elimination of Temporary Protected Status, the public charge rule change would affect the ability of families to stay together, as well as their immediate health and stability.

It is still possible to stop this detrimental rule. How you live your life and contribute to your community should define you in this country, not how much money you have or how you look. Comments opposing the rule change can be submitted through December 10 at www.regulations.gov.

¹ Figure 1 and 2, Smaller States Data. Fiscal Policy Institute, NY.

² [Immigration Officials Given Extremely Broad Authority Under Trump Administration's Proposed Rule](#), Shelby Gonzales, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 10, 2018.

³ [Greenstein: Trump Administration's Proposed Rule Will Result in Legal Immigrants of Modest Means Forgoing Needed Benefits](#), Robert Greenstein, September 24, 2018.

⁴ Small States Data, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

⁵ [District of Columbia SNAP Factsheet](#), Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

⁶ Small States Data, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.