

Don't penalize children for being poor, especially after Harvey

By David Lyon, Albert Zanatta and Simón Bautista Nov. 26, 2018

This past week, many of us sat down with our extended families at Thanksgiving celebrations. As faith leaders, we teach that family is sacred. We are moved to keep families together, so they may thrive together.

The Trump administration has proposed a policy that would force immigrant families to make an impossible choice between caring for their children, parents and grandparents and keeping their family

together in the United States. The proposed changes to the 100-year-old “public charge” regulation will make it more difficult for an immigrant to become a legal permanent resident or obtain a visa to visit the United States if he is not wealthy, have a preexisting health condition, or participate in programs that support health, nutrition and housing stability.

This proposed regulation seeks to keep eligible citizens from accessing basic health programs such as Medicaid or CHIP, food programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Section 8 housing vouchers and subsidies. All of these time-tested programs are designed to give eligible low-income families the support they need to escape poverty. The proposed regulation means that if an immigrant parent wants her children who are citizens to receive any of these benefits, that parent may lose the opportunity to become a legal permanent resident because she can be regarded as a “public charge” who is likely to become a burden to the United States.

In the Houston region, more than 560,000 U.S. citizens are children with immigrant parents. Working families previously not in need of public assistance and are now



Carissa Martinez, 3, dances with Daniel's Artistic Dance Company during the Holy Family Church Spring Festival at Mateo Camargo Park. Photo by: JOHN DAVENPORT, SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS

relying on these programs following the devastation of Hurricane Harvey. **The Metropolitan Organization** saw this need highlighted following the storm when we advocated for a three-day D-SNAP extension, which resulted in 27,000 additional families getting needed assistance. These families stood in line for hours for food benefits for their families. TMO also recalls the loss of wages immigrant families experienced following the storm. A majority of these immigrant parents are now working to help rebuild our region after Hurricane Harvey. It is simply wrong to penalize children for being poor, especially after Hurricane Harvey.

Like all children, those in immigrant families benefit when they have access to essential programs and services that help meet their basic needs and promote their development. Economic and food insecurity harm all family members but are particularly harmful to young children's development and will have lifelong repercussions. Immigrant parents will feel pressed to remove their children from these valuable support programs to avoid jeopardizing their own ability to become permanent legal residents in the future

We can help stop this regulation if we take action by December 10. When the administration proposes a new regulation, it must give the public an opportunity to comment. TMO urges you to indicate your opposition to this proposed regulation by making a comment on the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) website at <https://www.regulations.gov/> or by writing the Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen directly. This rule is shortsighted and punitive. It would generate fear that extends far beyond any individual who may be subject to the "public charge" test and will cause lasting harm to whole families and entire communities like ours. Visit https://www.tmohouston.org/public_charge to learn more and to get step-by-step instructions.

Restricting immigrant families' access to health, nutrition and housing programs that help ensure economic stability and well-being violates our religious values to welcome the stranger and to love our neighbors. We need to invest in families, rather than put their health and well-being at risk. At the season of Thanksgiving, let's give every family a reason to be grateful.

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