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Submit comments opposing the ‘public charge’ proposal!

Emma Lazarus’ poem at the foot of the Statue of Liberty invites the world to “give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” For centuries, people have come with little or nothing, and built new lives and new fortunes here. It’s the American Dream.

But now the Trump administration wants to slam the door on working-class immigrants by subjecting anyone who earns less than 250% of the federal poverty line (\$62,750 for a family of 4) to intense scrutiny, and effectively excluding anyone below 125% of FPL (\$31,375 for a family of 4).

Immigrants applying for a green card or visa could be deemed to be a “public charge” – someone who depends on the government – and turned away if they earn below 250% of FPL and use any of a wide range of public programs for working families, or are deemed to be likely to use them in the future.

This is an assault on America’s fundamental values, and we must fight back. Whether you’re an immigrant yourself, a community advocate, a service provider, a business owner, an elected official or just a concerned citizen, you can help us ensure that the government receives an overwhelming number of unique comments on this issue.

In partnership with Health Care for All, Health Law Associates and the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, we’ve put together this guidance and a collection of resources to help you.

You can submit your comments on our portal: <https://bit.ly/PIF-MA>. Your comments can be as short as 250 words, or as long as you need them to be; there’s a 5,000-character limit on the portal; if your comment is longer, please email it to us as a PDF (see contacts on reverse).

Email us also if you’d like to get feedback from us before submitting; if you need to remain anonymous, or if you have a comment in a language other than English. And please don’t sign on to someone else’s comments; submit your own! We need as many unique comments as possible.

Here’s some guidance:

For all comments: Clearly state your position upfront, then again at the end: For example: “I am writing to express my opposition to this proposed rule change.” And then finish: “For these reasons, I urge the administration to withdraw this proposal and leave the definition of ‘public charge’ unchanged.”

If you’re commenting in your personal capacity:

Focus on aspects of your personal/family context that inform your opinion. These may include your own immigration story, your immigrant parents or grandparents, and personal experience being working-class and/or using public programs. For example: “I am an immigrant from El Salvador who worked as a janitor for 10 years before starting my own business.” Or: “I wouldn’t be here if these standards had been in place decades ago. My father came to America from Hungary in 1942 with nothing but a suitcase, and he worked two jobs to put my sisters and me through college. We’re now a doctor, a college professor and an engineer.” Or: “I got pregnant when I was 21, and I relied on Medicaid to keep myself and my daughter healthy, even as I worked two jobs.”

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Flesh out your story and explain why the “public charge” proposal goes against your values – and against fundamental American values. If you are concerned that this rule change may affect you personally, say so! It’s crucial information.

If you’re commenting in your professional capacity:

Describe your organization and your position there.

It’s important to say what your organization does, the kinds of people it serves, and your role. Highlight relevant data about your connections to immigrants and/or to working-class families. For example: “I am a pediatrician at Downtown Community Health Center in City, Mass., which provides primary care for 5,000 working-class families, about 50% of whom are immigrants and their children.” Or: “I am a member of the TownX School Committee. Our district has 10,000 students, more than half of whom qualify for free or reduced-priced lunch. About 20% are immigrants, and 40% more are children of immigrants.” Or: “I am executive director of the Cape Verdean Women’s Collaborative, an immigrant-led nonprofit that helps women learn English, gain job skills and advance socio-economically.”

If you have special expertise or credentials, describe them.

For example: “I have a Ph.D. in public health and have published extensively on links between SNAP and school success.” Or: “I have 20 years’ experience teaching in urban high schools.”

If you work directly with immigrants, describe their context.

What countries do they come from? What kinds of jobs do they have? What do you know about how hard they work, why they came to the U.S., their economic situation, and the role, if any, that public benefits play in their families’ lives?

Why, specifically, are you concerned about public charge?

This is a two-part question. There are the implications of the proposal itself – e.g. that a mother seeking a green card could be denied because she was on Medicaid while pregnant – and the widespread fear that the proposal has caused. Dig into each as relevant to your work, providing concrete examples (“20 of my patients have disenrolled from Medicaid out of fear, leaving themselves without access to much-needed treatment for chronic diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure”). **Make sure to distinguish between facts and misinformation.** For example, the rule would not penalize parents for benefits received by their U.S. citizen children, or for participating in certain programs (e.g. WIC).

Do you have personal reasons to oppose this proposal?

Even if you’re submitting comments in your professional capacity, feel free to include your personal perspective as well. Many doctors who treat immigrant patients, e.g., are immigrants or children of immigrants themselves. That’s relevant, too. See guidance for personal comments above.

If you have questions, email Sarang Sekhavat at ssekhavat@miracoalition.org (legal expert) or Marion Davis at mdavis@miracoalition.org (writing advice, translation). To submit your comment as a PDF, email it to Liza Ryan at lryan@miracoalition.org.