



FLORIDA HEALTH JUSTICE PROJECT OFFICE OF NEW AMERICANS

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Fighting Fear with Facts

Advocates Say Confusion Over Administration's New Public Charge Rule Threatens Health and Well-being of Immigrant Families, Especially Children

(Miami, Florida) – Representatives of health care and immigrant rights groups speaking at a teleconference* in Miami, Florida this week said the administration's new "Public Charge" rule, which takes effect Monday, Feb 24, 2020, will have a chilling effect on immigrant families seeking health, nutrition and social services. While only directly affecting a small number of people, the new regulation has sowed fear and confusion among the immigrant community at large, disproportionately affecting children, whose parents have become afraid to enroll them in public assistance programs - Medicaid and SNAP (food assistance) - because they fear losing their legal status.

"This is a day that we hoped would never come – but it's essential that we understand what the regulation does and the threat it poses to our communities," said Madison Allen, Senior Policy Analyst at the Center for Law and Social Policy in Washington, D.C. "At its core, the public charge regulation is an attack on immigrant families with low incomes and an attempt to fundamentally alter our immigration system."

The rule puts a visa or green card applicant at risk of having their application denied if their income falls below 125% of the federal poverty level (\$32,188 per year for a family of four) or if they use Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly "Food Stamps") or "Section 8" rent vouchers. Conservative estimates peg the regulation's impact at 26 million people nationwide. Citizenship applications are not subject to the "public charge" regulation, and refugees, asylees, and other immigration statuses are also exempt.

"It's a highly technical rule and many people will get confused," said Dr. Matt Childers, Director of Research and Policy, Florida Health Justice Project in Miami. "Families fear the consequences."

Florida will be among the states that are hardest hit, where the new rule's chilling effect could lead to over 100,000 U.S.-born children with an immigrant parent losing access to health insurance and over 82,000 losing access to SNAP benefits. Almost 30% reside in Miami-Dade County, according to a report compiled by Childers. Up to 28,594 children in Miami-Dade, 14,558 children in Broward, and 10,552 children in Palm Beach Counties could lose access to health insurance because their parents may disenroll them from Medicaid or Kidcare. In addition, up to 23,779 children in Miami-Dade may lose access

to SNAP (food assistance) benefits for the same reasons. In Broward, up to 9,400 children and almost 9,000 in Palm Beach Counties may also lose access to SNAP benefits.

“This rule sets a negative tone and is discriminatory, threatening the health and safety of our most vulnerable communities,” said Adonia Simpson, an attorney with the Miami-based Americans for Immigrant Justice.

The intricacies of the rule could also jeopardize residency applications if immigrants attempt to proceed without legal representation, she added. “The impact for all is devastating – the potential for family separation is unspeakable.”

Simpson has already met immigrants at screening clinics who are foregoing programs and benefits to which they are entitled. She cites the example of a green card holder who has lived in the U.S. 15 years and is seeking naturalization. He said he wasn’t going to enroll his children in federal health care programs for fear it would negatively impact his application.

“We need to make sure the public has the right information on what is applicable and what is not,” said Krystina Francois, Executive Director of the Office of New Americans, a Miami-Dade public-private partnership created to help residents achieve full citizenship.

RESOURCES:

Immigrant and legal advocacy groups have set up hotlines and created information sheets in multiple languages to dispel rumors on the impact of the new public charge rule:

The Office of New Americans will provide information on applying for citizenship and offers referrals and resources for immigrants.

<https://www.miamidade.gov/global/initiatives/citizenship/home.page>

The Florida Immigrant Coalition (PIF) has set up a hotline, 1-888-600-5762 and created a series of “Know Your Rights” flyers.

<https://protectingimmigrantfamilies.org/know-your-rights/>

Florida Health Justice Project, an advocacy and legal education organization dedicated to assuring health care access, is sharing fact sheets.

<https://www.floridahealthjustice.org/immigrant-health.html>

Americans for Immigrant Justice will be hosting free legal screening clinics throughout Florida http://www.aijustice.org/free_legal_screening_clinics

Note to Media: Link to the recording of the teleconference: <http://bit.ly/PubChargeMiami>
Link to the Public Charge rule: <https://www.uscis.gov/legal-resources/final-rule-public-charge-ground-inadmissibility>

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