



Public Charge: Another Threat to Florida’s Immigrant Families

What is a public charge?

The “public charge” test is designed to identify people who may depend on government benefits as their main source of support. If someone is determined likely to become a “public charge,” the government can deny admission to the U.S. or refuse an application for lawful permanent residency. The Department of Homeland Security has drafted a proposal that would significantly expand long-standing “public charge” policy —forcing immigrant families to make an impossible choice between meeting basic needs and keeping their families together in this country. We anticipate that the draft regulation will be posted for public comment soon.

How is the “public charge” test applied today?

The only benefits currently considered are cash assistance (SSI or TANF) or government funded long-term care in an institution (e.g. Medicaid for a nursing home patient).

What would the proposed “public charge” rule change?

Draft proposed changes would allow the federal government to consider whether immigrants, or their family members including U.S. citizen children, have either applied for or received virtually any public benefit. Many programs designed to help low-income individuals and families meet basic needs could be considered, including: Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), subsidies provided through the Affordable Care Act, earned income tax credits, supplemental nutritional assistance (SNAP or food stamps); nutritional assistance for pregnant women, infants and children (WIC), housing assistance, including Section 8 vouchers and comparable state and local programs.

What are some potential impacts of the proposed rule change?

Lawfully present immigrants are already far more likely to be uninsured than U.S. citizens. The proposed rule would make that disparity even worse. If the proposed rule is finalized, pregnant women and parents of citizen children may choose to forego critical health care benefits for themselves or their families out of fear that receipt of coverage will adversely impact their ability to stay in the country with their families.

Once the proposed rule is published in the Federal Register, the public will have an opportunity to submit comments before it’s finalized. Policymakers need to hear stories about how proposed policies will harm families and communities. ***We need your help to connect with individuals and families to help them share their experience.***

For more information, please visit the national [Protecting Immigrant Families](https://www.protectingimmigrantfamilies.org) website and consider joining the national campaign. If you have any questions, please contact Miriam Harmatz, harmatz@floridahealthjustice.org