

The Trump Administration is proposing a rule that would hurt millions of children. The “public charge” rule makes it harder for lawfully present immigrants to obtain long-term status if they use critical programs that support health, nutrition, and economic stability. Various leaked drafts of the public charge rule have been circulating since early 2017. Immigrant families are already afraid to seek such programs as a result, putting the health and wellbeing of millions of children at risk. The final rule, which is scheduled to go into effect on October 15, 2019 unless it is held up by litigation, will only further frighten families.

The “public charge” test has been part of federal immigration law for over a hundred years. It is designed to identify people who may depend on the government as their main source of support. If the government believes someone is likely to become a “public charge,” it can deny them admission to the United States or lawful permanent residency (a “green card”). Historically, the federal government has considered a very short list of benefits when determining who is likely to become a “public charge.” The final rule expands this list, adding non-emergency Medicaid (with exceptions for children under 21 and pregnant women), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and housing assistance. It also penalizes immigrants for having low incomes, being too old or too young, having health conditions, or not speaking English well.

THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS IS VITAL TO OUR COUNTRY'S FUTURE

Children with immigrant parents are a large, growing segment of the U.S. child population.

One in four U.S. children has at least one parent born outside the United States. The vast majority (88 percent) of these children are U.S.-born citizens.¹ A smaller share are immigrants themselves.²

Children benefit when they—and their family members—can access programs and services that meet basic needs and promote healthy development.

Children need healthy foods; safe, stable housing; and adequate health care throughout childhood to grow up healthy and succeed as adults. The wellbeing of children now is essential to their own development and our country's future success.

Experiencing stress and instability—such as economic insecurity and not having enough to eat—harms children's development.

Substantial, persistent adversity—sometimes called toxic stress—in early childhood can interfere with brain development. That affects how children learn and manage their emotions. It can also lead to physical and mental health problems that last into adulthood. Insufficient food, inadequate or unstable housing, and economic insecurity are all examples of adverse experiences that can lead to toxic stress.

“Moms are afraid to sign back up for Medicaid, food stamps, and other services.”

*Quote by a North Carolina home visitor from CLASP's report **Our Children's Fear: Immigration Policy's Effects on Young Children***

Children in immigrant families benefit when they have access to programs and services that help meet their basic needs and promote their development.

Children are inherently dependent upon their parents for emotional, physical, and material support. Penalizing immigrant parents for using publicly funded health, nutrition, and housing programs—for which they are legally eligible—may also result in children losing these services. What’s more, parents’ own health and wellbeing affects their ability to meet children’s needs. The administration’s proposed rule would have devastating consequences, with adverse effects for generations to come.

Children thrive when **PARENTS THRIVE**

Parents’ and children’s health and wellbeing are inextricably linked. In the earliest years of life, children’s interactions and relationships with their primary caregivers lay the foundation for healthy development.⁵ Responsive caregiving lets children know they are safe and protected. That helps them regulate stress, encourages them to explore their environments, and supports early learning.⁶

When parents are healthy, well, and cared for, they’re better able to provide financially for their families and support their children’s development.⁷ Conversely, parents’ stress and health challenges—which can be caused by unstable housing, not having enough to eat, or financial insecurity—impede effective caregiving and can undermine children’s development.⁸

Children thrive when they have **NUTRITIOUS FOOD**

Children in immigrant families who participate in SNAP have more resources to afford medical care and prescription medications.⁹

Children thrive when they have **HEALTH CARE**

Children in immigrant families who have health insurance are more likely to have a primary medical provider and receive regular health care visits. They’re also less likely to have unmet care needs.¹⁰

Children thrive when they have **STABLE HOUSING**

Without housing assistance, children are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, become homeless, and move frequently.¹¹ They’re also more likely to remain in high-poverty neighborhoods, which is associated with poor health and educational outcomes.¹²

Because of the Trump Administration’s attacks, immigrant families are already choosing to forgo basic needs like food and health care out of fear. The “public charge” proposal would make it even worse.

CLASP has documented how current immigration policies are already harming young children in immigrant families. This includes families withdrawing from nutrition and health care programs, avoiding health clinics, and experiencing increased economic instability.¹³ Anecdotal reports of families declining assistance are reinforced by recent analyses showing declines in children’s Medicaid enrollment in 2017 and in immigrant families’ SNAP participation in 2018.¹⁴

If the final rule is fully implemented, the Kaiser Family Foundation predicts that as many as 2 million U.S. citizen children with immigrant parents could disenroll from Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), despite remaining eligible, out of fear of immigration-related consequences.¹⁵

Now is the time to advocate for and educate our communities.

The final rule goes into effect on **October 15, 2019**. The rule is not retroactive, meaning that food, housing, and health benefits families are using now and up to October 15 will **not** be considered in a future “public charge” determination. Immigrant families are encouraged to consult an immigrant rights organization or immigration lawyer to help make informed decisions for themselves and their children.

In the meantime, **we must all continue fighting**. Learn more about the final rule, community education resources, and how to take action at ProtectingImmigrantFamilies.org. For more information, contact **Rebecca Ullrich** (rullrich@clasp.org).

Citations

- ¹ Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, “Children in U.S. Immigrant Families,” <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/children-immigrant-families>.
- ² The public charge test would apply to children who are seeking to adjust their status to lawful permanent residency. For more information, see the PIF Campaign’s analysis and FAQ document: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FMcQYbV4DWPa9bPQn63oQVJkbkRqxe5dRmjVFi0lfg/edit>.
- ³ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, *Persistent Fear and Anxiety Can Affect Young Children’s Learning and Development: Working Paper No. 9*, 2010, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/persistent-fear-and-anxiety-can-affect-young-childrens-learning-and-development>.
- ⁴ Jack P. Shonkoff, Andrew S. Garner, et al. “The Lifelong Effects of Early Childhood Adversity and Toxic Stress,” *Pediatrics* 129 (2012).
- ⁵ Catherine Ayoub, Claire D. Vallotton, and Ann M. Mastergeorge, “Developmental Pathways to Integrated Social Skills: The Roles of Parenting and Early Intervention,” *Child Development* 82 (2011); Richard Lerner, Fred Rothbaum, Shireen Boulous, et al., “Developmental Systems Perspective on Parenting,” in *Handbook of Parenting: Volume 2 Biology and Ecology of Parenting*, ed. Marc H. Bornstein (2002).
- ⁶ Mary D Salter Ainsworth, Mary C. Blehar, Everett Waters et al., “Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation,” 1978; T. Berry Brazelton and Bertrand Cramer, “The Earliest Relationship: Parents, Infants, and the Drama of Early Attachment,” 1990.
- ⁷ Elisabeth Wright Burak, “Healthy Parents and Caregivers are Essential to Children’s Healthy Development,” Georgetown University Health Policy Institute, Center for Children and Families, 2016, <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2016/12/12/healthy-parents-and-caregivers-are-essential-to-childrens-healthy-development>; Anne Case and Christina Paxson, “Parental Behavior and Child Health,” *Health Affairs* 21 (2002), <http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/21/2/164.full>; Stephanie Schmit and Christina Walker, “Seizing New Policy Opportunities to Help Low-Income Mothers with Depression,” CLASP, 2016, <https://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Opportunities-to-Help-Low-Income-Mothers-with-Depression-2.pdf>; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child and National Forum on Early Childhood Program Evaluation, “Maternal Depression Can Undermine the Development of Young Children,” Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, Working Paper 8, 2009, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/maternal-depression-can-undermine-the-development-of-young-children>.
- ⁸ Megan Sandel, Richard Sheward, Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, et al., “Unstable Housing and Caregiver and Child Health in Renter Families,” *Pediatrics* 141 (2018); Katie K. Tseng, Su Hyun Park, Jenni A. Shearston, et al., “Parental Psychological Distress and Family Food Insecurity: Sad Dads in Hungry Homes,” *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 38 (2017); Caroline Ratcliffe and Signe-Mary McKernan, “Child Poverty and Its Lasting Consequence,” Urban Institute, 2012, <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/child-poverty-and-its-lasting-consequence>.
- ⁹ Children’s Health Watch, “Report Card on Food Security and Immigration: Helping Our Youngest First-Generation Americans To Thrive,” 2018, <http://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/Report-Card-on-Food-Insecurity-and-Immigration-Helping-Our-Youngest-First-Generation-Americans-to-Thrive.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ Christine Percheski and Sharon Bzostek, “Public Health Insurance and Health Care Utilization for Children in Immigrant Families,” *Maternal and Child Health Journal* 21 (2017).
- ¹¹ Michelle Wood, Jennifer Turnham, Gregory Mills, “Housing Affordability and Family Well-Being: Results from the Housing Voucher Evaluation,” *Housing Policy Debate* 19 (2008), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10511482.2008.9521639>; Janet Currie, Aaron Yelowitz, “Are Public Housing Projects Good for Kids?” *Journal of Public Economics* 75 (2000), <http://www.yelowitz.com/CurrieYelowitzJPubE2000.pdf>; Will Fischer, “Research Shows Housing Vouchers Reduce Hardship and Provide Platform for Long-term Gains Among Children,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015, <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-10-14hous.pdf>.
- ¹² Barbara Sard and Douglas Rice, “Realizing the Housing Voucher Program’s Potential to Enable Families to Move to Better Neighborhoods,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2016, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/realizing-the-housing-voucher-programs-potential-to-enable-families-to-move-to>.
- ¹³ Wendy Cervantes, Rebecca Ullrich, and Hannah Matthews, “Our Children’s Fear: Immigration Policy’s Effects on Young Children,” CLASP, 2018, <https://www.clasp.org/ourchildrensfear>.
- ¹⁴ Samantha Artiga, Raphael Garfield, and Anthony Damico, “Estimated Impacts of the Proposed Public Charge Rule on Immigrants and Medicaid,” Kaiser Family Foundation, 2018, <https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/estimated-impacts-of-the-proposed-public-charge-rule-on-immigrants-and-medicare>.