

# PROTECTING IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Washington State



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Wednesday, Oct. 10, 2018**

## **Advocates, Service Providers Condemn Trump’s “Public Charge” Income Test**

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Adam Holdorf, Children’s Alliance, (206) 326-9964

Sarah Sumadi, OneAmerica, (206) 723-2203 x226

Malou Chávez, Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, (206) 957-8633

Christina Wong, NW Harvest, (206) 306-5877

**SEATTLE, Wash.** — The Protecting Immigrant Families – Washington coalition condemns new regulations proposed by the Trump administration that would effectively impose an income test on family-based immigration and scare millions of families away from crucial health, housing and nutrition assistance.

The regulations, published in the Federal Register this morning, broaden the criteria by which immigration authorities may deny permanent resident status if an applicant legally uses essential federally-funded public services like Medicaid, Section 8, food stamps and Medicare Part D prescription drug subsidies.

Many immigrants in the United States are supporting themselves and their families through working low wage jobs without health insurance, and so depend on Medicaid for their healthcare or food stamps to help feed their families. Many mothers and fathers would have to choose between accepting help for basic human needs (such as food, medicine, and shelter) and keeping their families together.

“That’s an impossible choice,” said Jorge L. Barón, executive director of the Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (NWIRP), a member of the Protecting Immigrant Families – Washington coalition that formed after news of Trump’s plans broke last year.

The rule would also effectively impose an income test on immigration, making it harder for families who earn less than 250% of the federal poverty line to stay together in the U.S. permanently – a bar that a third of the entire U.S. population wouldn’t be able to clear. The income-based factor in the proposed rule could mean that immigration officials could deny

individuals who work in important but low-paid jobs — such as home health workers and custodians — the ability to remain in the United States or rejoin families here.

Trump's proposal also outlines other negative factors that could make it easier for immigrants to be deemed "public charges," such as not having a college education, speaking English with limited proficiency, or simply being under age 18 or over age 62.

With the release of the rule, and the accompanying publicity, more immigrants are likely to avoid services because of concern about compromising their immigration status. Chilling effects will reverberate beyond the population targeted by the regulation, due to complexity and confusion around precisely who will be affected, and in which programs. Parents may be afraid to take their children to the doctor for pediatric vaccinations, and pregnant women may be discouraged from accepting breastfeeding and nutrition assistance, even though these programs are not considered part of "public charge" in the current proposal.

"Here's one more of Trump's short-sighted, cruel-minded attacks on our future," said Barón. "It poses clear threats to low-income families, seniors, people with disabilities, immigrants and people of color."

Coalition members are advising people who fear they may be affected by Trump's rule not to refuse assistance for which they or members of their household are eligible. If finalized — a process likely to take several months — anyone subject to the rule will have time to act before it takes effect, and will not be penalized for benefits they received legally before the rule changed.

"Using SNAP, Medicaid or other benefits can help you and your family members become healthier, stronger, and more financially stable in the future," said Huma Zarif, staff attorney at Northwest Health Law Advocates, a coalition member that advocates for access to health care for Washington residents.

Families wondering if they're affected by this rule should know they're not alone; there are ways to fight back.

Members of the public can file comments in opposition to the rule's implementation on or before Monday, Dec. 10. A large volume of comments can impede or prevent the rule's implementation, as federal officials must read each comment and consider how to amend the rule in response. Coalition members are rallying 4,000 public comments to the Department of Homeland Security from Washington state individuals and organizations. They're also gathering personal accounts of people harmed by the drafting and publication of the proposed rule at <http://childrensalliance.org/protecting-immigrant-families-get-involved>. More information and

about the national Protecting Immigrant Families campaign is available at [www.protectingimmigrantfamilies.org](http://www.protectingimmigrantfamilies.org).

###