



Impact Brief

October 2018

Public Charge: Changing the Rules for Immigrants Affects All Contra Costa County

“Many great Americans came to this country as immigrants, arriving with nothing and starting their journey from the bottom rung of the economic ladder. Our history has shown us that access to critical benefits is often necessary for a short time in order to help immigrants become assimilated and ultimately prosper in their new country.”

(U.S. Conference of Mayors)

Overview

Nearly a quarter of Contra Costa County residents were born outside of the United States, a figure that represents the area’s diverse population. Almost half of the children in the County (age 0–17) have at least one parent not born in the U.S. These parents are naturalized citizens, green card holders and those who are aiming to become citizens; the children are largely U.S. citizens.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has proposed changing the rules for individuals who are applying to become Legal Permanent Residents (LPR or green card holders) or change their visa statuses.

The changes, if implemented, may have a detrimental impact on the well-being of affected children and families in Contra Costa who lawfully receive public benefits. Additionally, it may indirectly impact the broader community, including businesses, schools, neighborhoods, government agencies and community organizations.

CHILLING EFFECT

- Confusion and uncertainty about using public programs, even among families who will not be directly affected
- Could lead to unnecessary withdrawal from programs that support families and children
- Children who are legally eligible for benefit programs – including U.S. citizen children – may be unduly exposed to greater health risks, hunger and housing insecurity

Wholesale Changes to Public Charge Rules

DHS published proposed changes to the ‘public charge’ rules in the Federal Register on October 10, 2018. The agency’s proposal means overturning a century of existing policy and practice, expanding the types of benefits that may be considered for public charge.

What is Public Charge?

In immigration law, public charge is a term to describe someone who is likely to become dependent on the government for subsistence. It is a test that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) uses as one factor in determining

- ☑ who to grant entry into the United States,
- ☑ who can renew certain temporary visas and
- ☑ who can obtain Lawful Permanent Residency (LPR) – also known as a green card.

WHO MAY BE AFFECTED?

Some people who are:

- legally present in Contra Costa County
- on the path to Legal Permanent Residency
- working, but in lower-wage jobs without health insurance
- working and paying U.S. taxes, contributing to benefits for which they may be eligible

Contra Costa County is a high-cost area, where the Self-Sufficiency Standard (SSS) for a family of three is \$53,551. Hard-working people in the community sometimes rely on social safety programs in hard times in order to continue on a path toward self-sufficiency.

For those eligible, CalFresh, non-emergency Medi-Cal and housing assistance are frequently used by working families to stay healthy and productive.

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What rules does DHS want to change?

When weighing a person's LPR application, DHS proposes considering non-cash programs for the first time, such as:

- CalFresh
- Non-emergency Medi-Cal
- Section 8 vouchers and other housing assistance

Benefits that do **NOT** fall under DHS's proposed rule changes include:

- Public education (including Head Start)
- National school lunch programs
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)
- Veterans benefits

In addition, public charge does not apply to some categories of immigrants, including refugees, persons granted asylum and certified trafficking victims. There is no Public Charge test when a Legal Permanent Resident applies for naturalized citizenship.

Health and Economic Impacts on Entire Community

These changes have the potential to pose real health and economic consequences for our entire county as individuals may withdraw from supportive programs in fear, causing a ripple effect in the overall community. Disenrollment or foregone enrollment in benefit programs would lead to worse health outcomes and greater poverty risk for the families directly involved. It would also affect public health at large and the local economy.

HEALTH RISKS

- Families become reluctant to use health services
- Less preventive care use, including vaccines
- Sicker individuals in the community, exposing others to illness
- More emergency room visits

ECONOMIC COSTS

- Decreased revenues to health care providers, pharmacies, groceries and other retailers
- Reduced tax revenue as a result
- Uncompensated medical care
- Increased costs for organizations serving the immigrant community

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Contra Costa is a Welcoming County

In addition to the measurable harm that may result from the proposed changes, the potential impacts are not consistent with our county's values. These include treating each person with respect as well as committing to support ongoing inclusion and long-term economic and social integration of newcomers to the community.

What's Next

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors has adopted a position of opposing DHS's proposed regulations, which are NOT yet final. There is a 60-day period, from October 10th–December 10th, 2018, during which the public can submit comments and questions regarding the proposal. After that, DHS will review the comments and possibly make revisions before issuing a final rule. That process is expected to stretch into 2019.

What You Can Do

Concerned organizations and community members can submit comments to the Federal Register through December 10, 2018. Go to www.regulations.gov and search for "Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds" in order to submit your comments. You can also contact your local representatives at any time.

For more information and resources, visit <https://ehsd.org/public-charge-immigration/>

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

EMPLOYMENT & HUMAN SERVICES

