



A Health Equity Foundation



The Colorado Health Foundation™

November 29, 2018

L. Francis Cissna, Director
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20529-2140

RE: Formal comments concerning proposed rulemaking on Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012

Director Cissna,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments concerning the proposed rule change from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) division. As Colorado's largest private health foundations, the Colorado Health Foundation and The Colorado Trust join together to strongly oppose this change to the public charge assessment. If adopted, we believe these changes would severely jeopardize the health of children in the U.S. because they would reduce access to health care services, nutritious foods, and safe and stable housing. The proposed policy would also cause financial instability for thousands of American families and weaken Colorado's economy.

No one should have to make a choice between maintaining their health and jeopardizing their immigration or citizenship status in the United States. According to a 2017 Kaiser Family Foundation Disparities Policy issue brief, an increasing number of American families with mixed documentation status are experiencing significant barriers in access to health care services.¹ For many, this is due in large part to fears of being discriminated against. Local studies and surveys have already shown that system and policy changes like these have led to community health

¹ Kaiser Family Foundation (2017). Health Coverage of Immigrants. Available at: <https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/fact-sheet/health-coverage-of-immigrants/>

clinics in Colorado serving fewer immigrants and refugees, and this has already had negative consequences for the public's health.²

These fears and uncertainties have dire consequences for children, whose health is improved through participation in programs like Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Social safety-net programs such as these help Colorado families with low incomes access and receive high-quality primary care services. The proposed changes to the public charge assessment will create life-long negative consequences for our country's children and jeopardize family safety and security. **We urge the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the USCIS not to expand the definition of public benefits to include CHIP and other benefits. Rather, we urge you to narrow the proposed definition so that it does not include any health or human service benefits.**

We also know that Coloradans' quality of life is improved when they are able to obtain nutritious and affordable food so they do not go hungry. Unfortunately, we are already experiencing widespread hunger and food insecurity in our state. Almost 1 in 10 Colorado households struggles with hunger,³ and a staggering 1 in 7 children may not always know where their next meal will come from.⁴ We simply cannot afford to exacerbate these problems. Severely limiting access to SNAP benefits for children will result in dire consequences to their physical and mental well-being.

Current national estimates indicate that if this proposal is enacted, at least 875,000 (potentially up to 2 million) children may lose their health coverage,⁵ and upwards of 500,000 individuals across our nation may lose access to healthy foods – even though the children likely to be affected by this proposed rule include

² Mile High Health Alliance (2018). Decline in access to healthcare through safety-net clinics by immigrants and refugees in Denver. Available at: <http://milehighhealthalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Immigrant-Health-Drop-Off-Report-FINAL-3.18.pdf>

³ United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service (2018). Household Food Security in the United States in 2017. Available at: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/90023/err-256.pdf?v=0>

⁴ Colorado Children's Campaign (2018). KIDS COUNT! in Colorado. Available at: <https://www.coloradokids.org/data/kids-count-archive/2018-kids-count/>

⁵ Kaiser Family Foundation (2018). Potential Effects of Public Charge Changes on Health Coverage for Citizen Children. Available at: https://www.kff.org/report-section/potential-effects-of-public-charge-changes-on-health-coverage-for-citizen-children-issue-brief/#endnote_link_257512-5

thousands of U.S. citizens. Creating additional barriers to these programs will push the possibility of a healthy and prosperous life further from reach.

Proposed changes to the public charge assessment also hinder other pursuits like owning a home through the help of housing assistance programs like Section 8 housing vouchers or tax credits like the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program. Local polling conducted in Colorado in both 2017⁶ and 2018⁷ identified housing as a top concern for Coloradans as housing costs have become less affordable across our state. An increasing number of Coloradans continue to spend more than 30 percent of their incomes on their housing costs, causing instability when it comes to simply staying in their homes and meeting other basic needs.⁸ The already high cost of housing means that our families spend less on preventative medical care and nutritious food.

Pursuits like home ownership not only help Coloradans to maintain their health but also help drive our economy forward. However, if this proposal is adopted, we anticipate a 6 percent disenrollment rate from current programs like Medicaid, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), SNAP and other subsidies that will negatively impact Colorado's economy by \$45 million per year. Direct impacts in our state will include an anticipated rise in the uninsured rate for children to 6.7 percent, more than double our current historic low of 3 percent.⁹

One in ten Coloradans is foreign-born, based on statistics from the Migration Policy Institute. They operate 35,000 small and local businesses across our state, generating just shy of one billion dollars in revenue annually.¹⁰ We embrace our immigrant and naturalized citizen community with open arms, and strongly oppose any proposal that limits their ability to achieve their greatest potential.

⁶ Colorado Mesa University, Social Research Center (2017). Centennial State Survey. Available at: <https://coloradomesa.edu/social-research-center/documents/centennial-state-survey-april-2017.pdf>

⁷ Kaiser Family Foundation & Colorado Health Foundation (2018). Coloradans' Perspectives on Health, Quality of Life, and Midterm Elections. Available at: <https://coloradohealth.org/sites/default/files/documents/2018-10/KFF-CHF-Report-Coloradans%E2%80%99%20Perspectives%20on%20Health%20Quality%20of%20Life%20and%20Midterm%20Elections.pdf>

⁸ Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (2017). Housing Stability: Lack of Affordable Housing. Available at: https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/sites/default/files/PSD_SDOH_Housing-Stability_long.pdf

⁹ Colorado Health Institute (2018). Changing the "Public Charge" and Health Insurance in Colorado. Available at: <https://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/research/changing-public-charge-and-health-insurance-colorado>

¹⁰ Migration Policy Institute (2016). State Immigration Data Profiles – Colorado. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/CO>

This proposed policy change would be devastating to the health and well-being of Coloradans. It would also create negative impacts to other programs that would bear the brunt of increased poverty, as well as the loss of economic resiliency and prosperity in our state and nation. If millions of people in the U.S. lose health coverage – 75,000 alone in Colorado – and 500,000 people lose access to healthy foods, our communities will suffer dramatically. **We urge DHS and the USCIS office to reject these proposed changes as inhumane, inequitable and detrimental to the continued economic strength of our state.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback on this proposed rule. If you have any questions, or seek clarification, do not hesitate to contact Jin Alexander Tsuchiya, public policy officer at the Colorado Health Foundation, by email at jtsuchiya@coloradohealth.org, or Noelle Dorward, advocacy and policy partner at The Colorado Trust, by email at noelle@coloradotrust.org.

Thank you,



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