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## **Business Leaders Voice Concern About Trump Plan to Crack Down on Immigrants Using Public Benefits**

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A Trump administration proposal making it harder for immigrants to legally enter the U.S. or remain here if they use public benefits would impede hiring, impose legal burdens and slow down an already backlogged immigration system, business leaders are warning.

“As business leaders who run companies that employ thousands of workers, both American-born and Americans-in-waiting, we understand what a devastating impact this policy would have on business growth, economic vitality and U.S. competitiveness,” reads a letter signed more than 100 executives.

The missive, which will be submitted as part of the public comment phase for the proposed rule, was signed by a host of tech-based companies including Foursquare, the location-sharing mobile app; Warby Parker, the eyeglass maker; and Plated, the meal-kit service. The public comment period ends Monday.

The Department of Homeland Security announced the [proposal in September](#) as a way to promote self-sufficiency among immigrants and protect American taxpayers. Certain groups, including refugees and those granted asylum, would be exempt.

It is longstanding U.S. law that immigrants deemed a “public charge,” meaning they primarily rely on cash-based government support, can be denied a visa. The administration broadens the current definition to noncash assistance for food, housing and health care, which immigrants can legally use, and would apply not just to people currently in the country but those seeking to enter legally.

The new regulations would also allow officials to search for past use of public benefits, and “negative factors” including low income, bad credit scores, education level and lack of English proficiency. People with higher incomes, meanwhile, would be looked on favorably.

“Our concern is that the definition of public-charge risk is much too broad,” Jeff Glueck, CEO of Foursquare, told The Wall Street Journal. Warby Parker CEO Dave Gilboa said, “Imposing these excessive and nonsensical boundaries on individuals seeking temporary visas and green cards would drastically narrow the opportunity for brilliant talent to come to the U.S.”

DHS declined to address the business concerns on Thursday, citing the open public comment period.

The executives who signed the letter represent smaller companies but immigration policy is a paramount concern across the business landscape as workers, skilled and unskilled, are in demand. While President Trump has publicly focused on combating illegal immigration and building a border wall, his administration has moved on various fronts to tighten legal immigration.

In August, IBM CEO Ginni Rometty was one of more than 60 business leaders who wrote a letter to the Department of Homeland Security criticizing an immigration system they said was unfair and inconsistent to the highly skilled employees who make up a significant part of their workforce.

“Many employees find themselves stuck in an immigration process lasting more than a decade,” the CEOs said in the letter, which was coordinated by the lobbying group Business Roundtable. “Out of fairness to these employees—and to avoid unnecessary costs and complications for American businesses—the U.S. government should not change the rules in the middle of the process.”

Ms. Rometty was one of several tech industry leaders who met at the White House on Thursday to discuss closer collaboration with the government on areas including artificial intelligence and better training for American workers.

While the public-charge rule wasn’t part of the agenda for that meeting, industry analysts say it will have sweeping ramifications. Homeland Security estimates 382,000 people in the U.S. could be affected annually, a figure that doesn’t include people trying to enter the country.

Immigrant advocacy groups say they fear immigrants will choose to forgo nutritional or health aid to protect their chances of getting a visa. Homeland Security acknowledged in September this could happen but said the intent of the rule is to implement current law and promote self-sufficiency among immigrants.

Businesses say they will be burdened with ensuring prospective employees meet the new standard, a process that will require significant documentation and legal assistance.

“The public-charge rule will be one of the largest and most complex immigration regulations ever, and it will affect every single business who hires foreign workers,” said David Bier, a policy analyst at the Cato Institute. “The added legal costs alone will be significant, and even a small increase in the denial rate could keep out thousands of workers and impose untold regulatory uncertainty on all companies.”

He noted that the proposal states that employer-sponsored immigrants should have adequate income but argued that the rules could deny people who are up to 95% self-sufficient. “The way this is being sold as ‘We’re keeping out people who are welfare dependent and not workers’ is just not true,” Mr. Bier said.