



## Newark councilman: Trump's immigration policy will hurt our city

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As councilman for Newark's East Ward for the last 20 years, I've been proud to witness our city's economic and cultural resurgence. As a native of Portugal, I'm also proud of the role immigrants from all over the world have played in Newark's prosperity. Immigrants in our Congressional district, contribute almost \$2 billion in taxes and wield nearly \$5 billion in spending power, according to the bipartisan nonprofit, New American Economy. We are also 63 percent more likely to be entrepreneurs than native-born Americans, which means we're not just providing vital services to the entire community but creating jobs for our American neighbors.

For these reasons, I was dismayed to learn that the Trump administration is considering a new policy that would dramatically reduce the number of immigrants who are eligible to obtain green cards, resulting in the possible deportation of millions of people across the country and loss of up to \$164 billion, according to NAE.

The proposed policy would make any immigrant who uses more than 15 percent of the poverty line in public benefits for themselves or their non-American children a "public charge" -- and bar them from permanent residency. Of course, we want people to be self-sufficient. But by this standard, according to the conservative-leaning Cato Institute, an immigrant who uses just \$2.50 in benefits a day -- i.e. is 95 percent financially independent -- would be considered a "public charge."

This policy could have serious consequences for Newark. The construction industry is expected to be highly impacted by the new policy -- a problem considering that almost 60 percent of our district's construction industry is foreign born. Professional and business services as well as industries like transportation to utilities are also likely to be impacted.

These too, are fields in which sizable portions of our city's workforce (40-50 percent) are foreign-born. The fact is, 90 percent of Newark's low-skilled immigrants--the demographic most likely to require some public assistance -- are employed fulltime. We need them to keep our buses running, our offices open and our lights on.

Dependence on public assistance isn't an immigrant problem; it's an American problem. It's a result, in part, of sluggish wage increases and a shortage of affordable housing, things that affect all of us. And in fact, low-skilled immigrants in Newark are actually less dependent on public programs like welfare, Medicaid and food stamps than their native-born American counterparts. Immigrants may come here with very little, but more often than not, they work their way upwards until they can stand on their own feet.

That was certainly true for my family, when we came here from a small town in the north of Portugal. When my father arrived in 1927, the only jobs available to him were in construction and manufacturing, but he worked tirelessly to build a strong foundation for our family. When I first arrived here in 1966, I also hustled, attending Rutgers University at night while working a factory job during the day. The support I received from my family -- but also the community -- was essential to my success. It's what allowed me to believe in the American dream.

Now, the administration's new public charge policy -- which is unjustly punitive and economically short-sighted -- is poised to dash that dream for a new generation of immigrants. We want policies that strengthen our cities, not gut them. Immigrants have long played an important role across our city and especially in the Ironbound neighborhood of the East Ward.

In fact, Newark just placed first in New American Economy's Cities Index, which ranks how well immigrants are integrating and succeeding in the nation's 100 largest cities. We were awarded top scores in the categories of government leadership, legal support, community, job opportunities, economic prosperity and livability.

The city of Newark clearly believes in the potential of its foreign-born residents. Thanks in part to municipal outreach, we now have 32,400 naturalized citizens. Thousands of others dream of becoming American.

All of these people are in the process of realizing the American dream, leaning not only to adapt but to thrive.

Many of them have spent decades raising their families in Newark, shopping in our stores, running local businesses and contributing to our community's cultural fabric. Some of them needed help when they first arrived; perhaps some still do. But economically and civically, they are giving far more than they take.