



## President Trump’s “public charge” policy for immigrants would hurt Cleveland - and time is running out to oppose it

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When I was a kid, growing up in Cleveland’s St. Clair-Superior neighborhood, my parents struggled to make ends meet. My dad, the son of Slovakian immigrants, worked long hours at an electronics production plant and my mom, an immigrant from the former Yugoslavia, stayed home to take care of my sister and me. When I was 12, my dad’s wages were cut, and we relied on a food bank to get by. My mom was so embarrassed by our block of cheese from the USDA box, that she hid it in aluminum foil so friends and neighbors wouldn’t know.

My family’s struggle didn’t deter my parent’s drive to achieve the American Dream. My dad spent more than 30 years in manufacturing and eventually he and my mom put two children through private school. My sister went on to earn her doctorate in religious studies, and I served on the Cleveland City Council for 18 years. We not only survived, we thrived, and gave back to our community along the way. During nearly two decades in public service, I passed LGBTQ human rights legislation, increased funding for agencies serving people with mental health needs, and supported the development of more than 15,000 new housing units in my ward.

I was disheartened to learn about the Trump administration’s proposed “public charge” rule. Under the proposal, an immigrant family of four would be considered government-dependent if they used just \$2.50 per person per day in benefits. Such immigrants could lose the ability to gain permanent residency and citizenship in the United States.

If passed, this rule would have serious consequences for Cleveland. Immigrants have long played an important role in helping our city grow and flourish.

Our 117,183 immigrant residents have more than \$3.1 billion in spending power, and a large portion of them work in science and tech services, according to the bipartisan nonprofit New American Economy.

Further, more than one out of every five Main Street business owners in the Great Lakes region are foreign-born, creating nearly 240,000 jobs for U.S.-born workers between 2000 and 2015. More than 8,000 of these entrepreneurs are in Cleveland.

Immigrants in Cleveland make important contributions to the city and are succeeding here, as evidenced by NAE’s new Cities Index, an analysis of how well immigrants are integrating in the

nation's 100 largest cities. Our perfect "livability" score, which measures rates of home ownership and health-insurance coverage among immigrants, is a prime example of this.

And yet the public charge rule not only threatens to reverse this success but might gut our city's workforce. Cleveland's immigrants play a crucial role in education, health care and transportation industries, which are also those likely to be most affected by the proposed rule. That's because hard-working Clevelanders -- Americans and immigrants alike -- don't always make enough to be 100 percent self-sufficient. That's not the fault of these employees; that's the result of stagnant wages and rising inequality.

The fact is, we need more immigrant workers here, not fewer. As the president of Global Cleveland, a nonprofit that welcomes and connects international newcomers to economic and social opportunities in the region, I often talk to companies who say they're experiencing extreme talent gaps in science and tech, as well as health care and advanced manufacturing. We help steer immigrants into local workforce programs and into the job pipeline, but it's not enough. Our prosperity and economic development depend on welcoming immigrants, and Trump's public charge policy will only hurt us.

If passed, the rule will mostly impact hard-working residents of Cleveland who are growing our economy. Nationally, more than 91 percent of noncitizens in the labor force who would be affected by the public charge rule are currently employed and earning a collective \$96.4 billion in annual income, according to NAE.

And the conservative-leaning Cato Institute found that this rule would likely apply to individuals who are 95 percent self-sufficient. These individuals shouldn't have to choose between survival and citizenship. Launching a business is more difficult if you're worried about how to put food on the table. We already have a high rate of hunger in Ohio – let's not make it any harder than it already is for newcomers to find their place in this country. Our economy, and the future of our city, depends on it.