



## Op Ed: Trump's Proposed Public Charge Rule Will Hurt Immigrants — and American Families

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As an advocate for health-care access and reproductive justice, I help people understand their rights and access important services, including public benefits. Programs like Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, better known as SNAP, have especially benefited immigrant families who are working to build a life for themselves in a new country. Being able to put food on the table and managing their health means that people can get on their feet — and stay there. The fact is, a tiny bit of support can make all of the difference, for individuals, families and communities.

That's why I am so concerned about the Trump administration's proposed Public Charge Rule, which would prevent many immigrants who use public benefits from obtaining permanent residency or citizenship. If the rule is implemented, nearly 7 million people could be affected nationwide, including 120,000 immigrant families in Colorado. Eventually, many of these people could be deported. This proposal is beyond cruel, but it also doesn't make economic sense.

If the United States deported every single immigrant who has accessed public benefits, thousands of people would be torn away from their communities and the country would lose approximately \$68 billion, according to the bipartisan nonprofit New American Economy. While I believe that we should protect the interests of immigrant families because it is the right thing to do, it is worth noting the huge negative fiscal impact of these ill-begotten policies.

Many of the immigrants likely to be affected by this rule change also work in fields with severe worker shortages. Take home health aides, who provide personal care for the elderly as well as people with illnesses, disabilities or cognitive impairment. Their work is critical, yet they are some of the lowest-paid workers in the country. Should they be at risk for deportation simply because their salaries aren't always enough to make ends meet? We need these people, and yet for reasons beyond their control, we're threatening to send them away.

The fact is that more than nine out of every ten immigrants in the labor force who would likely be affected by the rule change are in fact employed and earn \$96.4 billion in collective annual income. The conservative-leaning Cato Institute estimates that a family of four who uses just \$2.50 per person per day through a public support program could soon be considered "unduly dependent" on the government. This is absurd; it means that someone who is 95 percent self-supporting could be deported.

The rule is also harmful to children. According to the Colorado Fiscal Institute, an estimated 143,000 children in Colorado, immigrants and U.S. citizens alike, would be affected. And a chilling effect has already begun. At my nonprofit, I've seen families dis-enrolling from health care, cancelling their doctors' appointments and failing to seek out urgent care. In fact, a pilot

study by the Mile High Health Alliance found that between 17 to 20 percent fewer immigrants in our region are coming forward to receive the health services they need since the rule was announced.

Our state depends on and is enriched by immigrants, many of whom work multiple low-wage jobs that don't provide benefits. And with the rising cost of housing and child care, we know that many people — regardless of immigration status — need public benefits at some point in their lives. Yet with this proposed rule, the Trump administration would give people an impossible choice: Provide for yourself and your family so you are able to work and contribute to your community, or risk being cast out. If this heartless rule is implemented, both our economy and our families will suffer. I believe as Coloradans that we're better than that.