

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSED "PUBLIC CHARGE" RULE

What Housing and Homelessness Advocates Should Know

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On September 22, 2018, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published a draft proposed rule on their website, which seeks to change the way in which the agency determines whether an immigrant is likely to become a "public charge." Noncitizens can be considered a public charge if they are likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsistence, and, therefore, can be deemed inadmissible or denied a green card.

This proposed rule directly affects immigrants and their families applying for and receiving public housing and Section 8 rental assistance. As drafted, the rule departs from longstanding immigration policy by making it more likely for certain immigrants to be deemed public charges because they have received, currently receive, or could receive certain kinds of public benefits.

The most recent draft published by DHS is expected to be nearly identical to the final proposed rule, and significantly diverges from earlier versions of the proposed rule leaked by the media. This fact sheet highlights what housing and homelessness advocates should know about the most recent draft public charge rule and how they can be involved in fighting this rule.

What is a public charge?

Currently, a "public charge" is defined as a person who is "**primarily dependent** on the government for subsistence, as shown by either the receipt of **public cash assistance** or institutionalization for long-term care at the government's expense" (emphasis added). The draft rule would change this definition to include any applicant who **uses or receives, or is likely to use or receive, one or more public benefits, including non-cash benefits.ⁱ The draft rule provides an exclusive list of benefits that will be considered in a public charge determination, including Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, Section 8 Project Based Rental Assistance, and Public Housing. For a full list of covered programs, see Table 2 of this fact sheet.**

How is a public charge determination made?

Federal law currently requires immigration officials to look at multiple factors, including the noncitizen's age, health, income, assets, family status, education, and skills, as well as whether an applicant has submitted a sufficient affidavit of support (a contract promising to support the immigrant at 125% of the federal poverty level). This totality of circumstances test allows immigration officials to consider whether the person has used or relied primarily on (1) public cash assistance or (2) long-term government-funded institutionalization.

DHS's proposed rule broadens the definition of public charge to consider whether an applicant uses or receives, or is likely to use or receive, **cash or certain non-cash assistance** from the government for basic living necessities, such as housing, health care, and nutrition. The rule would weigh any use of benefits as a heavily negative factor. However, the draft rule states that **non-cash benefits previously excluded from the public charge determination would be considered only if those benefits are received on or after a 60-day grace period that will begin after the final rule is published.**

The rule states that USCIS officers will also be able to consider whether an immigrant applicant used any covered benefits within the past 36 months, but it is important to note that this "look-back" period will not begin to toll for non-cash benefits until after the completion of the 60-day grace period. Additionally, in a major shift from previous drafts, the public charge determination of an individual immigrant will only examine the immigrant's personal use of these benefits—children's use of these benefits will not be counted against their parents.

DHS has also proposed new factors that the agency would weigh negatively or positively when making a public charge determination. For example, negative factors would include not being proficient in English, having a bad credit score, earning less than 125% under the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG), being a child or a senior, having certain medical conditions without access to private health insurance, and lacking a high school diploma. A positive factor would be having an income of over 250% FPG. The sponsor's affidavit of support would be relevant (and in many cases required) but would not be sufficient on its own to overcome a public charge determination. However, a finding of an insufficient affidavit of support will result in the immigrant being "found inadmissible based on public charge regardless of any other evidence the [immigrant] may submit."

Who would be affected by the rule?

The rule would primarily affect noncitizens who are applying for lawful permanent resident status, individuals seeking an extension of or changes to their non-immigrant status, and immigrants seeking admission into the United States. However, some immigrants will not be subject to the public charge rules. These include refugees, asylees, survivors of trafficking and other serious crimes, self-petitioners under the Violence Against Women Act, special immigrant juveniles, certain people who have been paroled into the U.S., several other categories of noncitizens, as well as lawful permanent residents applying for U.S. citizenship. Table 1 examines the list of immigrant categories eligible to receive public housing and Section 8 and whether those categories of immigrants would be exempted from public charge determinations.

The new proposed rule will <u>not</u> consider whether an applicant's dependents, including both immigrant and U.S. citizen children, have ever sought, received, or used public benefits. However, the proposed rule will factor in an applicant's family size, requiring applicants with larger families to meet a higher income threshold to be deemed financially "self-sufficient." Additionally, dependents stand to be harmed if their family members choose to forgo covered housing benefits due to concerns that it could jeopardize their ability to change immigration status. For a fact pattern where an immigrant may be faced with this decision, see Example 1 under the question: *How will the use of housing benefits be evaluated?*

Table 1 – Comparison: Eligibility for Housing Assistance and Public Charge Exemptions under Proposed Rule		
Immigrants Eligible for Public Housing and Section 8 Programs	Subject to the Public Charge Test?	
Lawful Permanent Residents.iii	No (with limited exceptions).iv	
Immigrants granted lawful permanent residence through registry under section 249 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. § 1259).	No (with limited exceptions).vi	
Asylees.vii	Noviii	
Refugees.ix	Nox	
Parolees.xi	Yes (with some exceptions) – public charge rule applies when seeking change of status ^{xii}	
Granted withholding of Removal.xiii	Yes – public charge rule applies when seeking change of status ^{xiv}	
Immigrants admitted for permanent residence under section 245A of the Immigration and Nationality Act [8 USCS § 1255a].xv	No (with limited exceptions) ^{xvi}	
Immigrants admitted for temporary residence under section 245A of the Immigration and Nationality Act [8 USCS § 1255a].xvii	Yes – public charge rule applies when seeking change of status ^{xviii}	
Immigrants lawfully admitted pursuant to section 141 of the Compacts of Free Association with the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and Palau (COFA) (48 U.S.C. 1931 note).xix	Yes ^{xx}	
Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) Self- Petitioners.xxi	No ^{xxii}	
Immigrants that seek, or have received, official T-visa status as a Survivor of Trafficking.xxiii	No (with limited exceptions)*xxiv	

How will the use of housing benefits be evaluated?

The proposed rule states that USCIS will only take into consideration the portion of housing benefits that is attributable to the applicant. In the case of mixed-status families, USCIS will not consider benefits received by the mixed-status household if the immigrant-applicant is ineligible to receive that benefit.*

Example 1 – All Family Members are Immigrants Eligible to Receive Housing Assistance

- The Smith family, a father and two teenaged children, was paroled into the U.S. under section 212(d)(5) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(d)(5)). All members are eligible to receive a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher. The Smith family receives \$300 a month under the program.
- Mr. Smith married a U.S. Citizen and applies to change his status to that of a Lawful Permanent Resident. Since Mr. Smith is applying for status through a family-based visa petition, he is subject to the public charge test, which would weigh against him the portion of the housing voucher that is attributable to Mr. Smith. USCIS would divide the voucher by the number of eligible household members:
 - \$300 a month/ 3 eligible household members = \$100 a month attributable to Mr. Smith.
- One hundred dollars would count against Mr. Smith. The remaining \$200 of the voucher would not be held against Mr. Smith in his public charge determination.
- Mr. Smith may choose to forgo his part of the subsidy so as not to have this negative factor
 weigh against him in the public charge test. If this happens, the voucher subsidy would be
 prorated, harming the rest of the household as the unit would become less affordable for
 everyone in the family.

Example 2 – Mixed-Status Family

- The Jones family includes two household members—Mrs. Jones and her infant, Sarah. Sarah was born in the U.S. and is a U.S. citizen who qualifies for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. Mrs. Jones, who entered the U.S. on a student visa, is an immigrant who is not eligible for assistance under the program. The Jones family receives \$300 a month under the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.
- Mrs. Jones applies to change her status to that of a Lawful Permanent Resident through a
 family-based petition, and is a category of immigrant that is not exempted from the public charge
 rule. However, since Mrs. Jones is not eligible to receive benefits under the Section 8 Housing
 Choice Voucher Program, USCIS will not count any amount of the voucher against Mrs.
 Jones in her public charge inadmissibility determination.

How does the rule affect the use of housing and homeless assistance programs?

The proposed rule only covers three federal housing programs: Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance, and Public Housing. Under current federal guidance, housing benefits are explicitly excluded from the public charge determination. However, the proposed rule would allow immigration officials to consider the receipt of assistance from these three programs when evaluating whether an applicant is likely to become a public charge. The most recent draft of the proposed rule will not consider use of homeless assistance programs.

The rule states that benefits received by dependents, including both immigrant and U.S. citizen children, will not be taken into consideration in public charge determinations. This means that

mixed-status families would not be explicitly targeted under the proposed rule. However, given the breadth of factors the rule permits USCIS officers to consider under its totality of the circumstances examination, advocates are still concerned that mixed-status families may still be harmed by the proposed rule when it is applied. Further, if a child is applying for status themselves, any subsidy that they receive would be weighed against them in a public charge test.

The rule would have a chilling effect on immigrant families not subject to the rule and would undermine the goal of self-sufficiency. This proposed rule will increase the panic, fear, and confusion already felt by millions of immigrant families across the country due to the Trump Administration's ongoing anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies. Regardless of whether they are technically subject to the rule, this proposal will deter many eligible immigrant families from seeking much-needed housing and homelessness benefits. Those already participating in these programs will feel compelled to give up the lifeline assistance that keeps their families one step away from homelessness. Studies have shown that unstable housing situations can cause individuals to experience increased hospital visits, loss of employment, and mental health problems.**

Available housing is crucial to a person's good health, sustaining employment, and overall self-sufficiency. The proposed rule threatens to undermine the overall well-being of low-income immigrants and their families.

The rule would exacerbate child poverty and homelessness. The proposed rule would have dire effects on health and educational outcomes for the children of immigrants, hampering economic mobility, increasing child and family poverty, and undercutting ongoing efforts to prevent and end homelessness. Programs such as SNAP and the Housing Choice Voucher program help support children and families on their path to self-sufficiency, and open up educational and economic opportunities in the long-term, especially for individuals who received assistance as young children. Such a rule is likely to trap low-income immigrant families in intergenerational poverty, and harm society and the economy in the process. The proposed rule would have directly effects on health and educational economic opportunities are supported by the process.

When would this rule be in effect?

DHS released an unofficial copy of the proposed rule on its website on September 22, 2018, and advocates expect that a substantially similar final draft will be officially published within the next week. Once DHS has officially published the rule in a notice for proposed rulemaking (NPRM) in the Federal Register, the public will then have a 60-day window to comment on the proposed rule. Once the public comment period expires, DHS must then review and address all public comments made and prepare a final rule to be reviewed by OMB before a finalized rule could take effect. An overview of the process is available here.

What should I tell clients and others who are worried about this rule?

This is only a proposal. The rules governing public charge determinations in the U.S. have not yet changed. The proposed rule indicates that any changes to the consideration of benefits use will apply only to benefits received 60 days after the final rule is published. The final rule is unlikely to be published for months—to even more than a year—from now. There is significant value for families to continue to receive housing and nutrition assistance and healthcare in promoting health, stability, and ensuring self-sufficiency. Individuals who have questions about their own situation should consult with an immigration attorney. For more information, see the Mom's Rising fact sheet on *What You Need to Know on the*

<u>Public Charge Rule & Immigrant Families</u>. We encourage everyone to fight back by submitting comments to DHS opposing this proposed rule (see below).

What can I do?

We are working closely with the Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) Campaign, led by the National Immigration Law Center and the Center for Law and Social Policy, to coordinate advocacy efforts.

- We strongly urge advocates to submit comments once DHS issues the notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) concerning the catastrophic impact that this rule would have on immigrants and their families.
- You should educate state and local policy makers about how this rule will have negative effects
 on housing and homelessness by using client stories and data on how immigrants are served by
 homelessness and housing benefits.

Where can I get more information?

The Protecting Immigrant Families Campaign's <u>webpage</u> has up-to-date resources on the public charge rule and related policies. This <u>fact sheet</u> by the Center for Law and Social Policy has more details regarding the proposed public charge rule.

For further assistance, please contact Karlo Ng at kng@nhlp.org, or Arianna Cook-Thajudeen at acooktha@nhlp.org.

Table 2: Comparison Chart between Proposed Public Charge Rule and Current Guidance Source: Updated version of a chart created by the Kaiser Family Foundation			
	Current Public Charge Policy	Durch Durance d Durla	
	(Based on 1999 Field Guidance)	Draft Proposed Rule	
Definition of Public Charge	A noncitizen who has become or who is likely to become " primarily dependent on the government for subsistence, as demonstrated by either the receipt of public cash assistance for income maintenance or institutionalization for long-term care at government expense."	A person who uses or receives one or more public benefits. "Public benefits" are limited to a list of specific programs enumerated in the rule. This list includes federal, state, or local cash assistance, federal "monetized" non-cash benefits, and federal "non-monetizable" benefits (for a list, see below under "Benefits that May be Considered").	
Consideration of Use of Public Benefits in in a Public Charge Determination	 May take into consideration past and current receipt of cash public assistance for income maintenance or institutionalized long-term care No weight should be placed on receipt of non-cash benefits or receipt of cash benefits for purposes other than income maintenance 	 May consider: Whether a person uses or receives a covered public benefit Whether a person has used or received a covered public benefit within the last 36 months Whether individual has received or is likely to receive any government housing assistance 	
Consideration of Use of Public Benefits by Children and Other Family Members in a Public Charge Determination	Cash benefits received by children or other family members should not be attributed to the individual, unless the family member's benefits are the family's sole source of support.	Will not count dependents, including U.S. citizen children, request, receipt or past receipt of public benefits against the applicant.	
Benefits that may be	• SSI	Cash Benefits	
considered for public charge determinations	• TANF	○ SSI	
(non-exhaustive list)	State/local cash assistance programs	o TANF	
	Public assistance for long-term care in an institution (including	 Federal, State or local cash assistance programs for income maintenance 	
	Medicaid)	Monetized Non-Cash Benefits	
		 SNAP (formerly Food Stamps) 	
		 Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program 	
		 Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance 	
		Non-Monetized Non-Cash Benefits	
		o Medicaid	
		 Public assistance for long- and short- term institutionalized care 	
		 Premium and Cost Sharing Subsidies for Medicare Part D 	
		o Public Housing	

Examples of Benefits that may not be considered for public charge determinations

- Medicaid and other health insurance and health services (except for institutional long-term care)
- CHIP
- Nutrition programs, including SNAP (formerly Food Stamps), WIC, the National School Lunch and Breakfast program, and other supplementary and emergency food assistance programs
- Housing benefits
- Child care services
- Energy assistance, such as LIHEAP
- Emergency disaster relief
- Foster care and adoption assistance
- Educational assistance, including Head Start
- Job training programs
- In-kind community-based programs
- State and local programs
- Earned cash payments (e.g., Social Security, veteran's benefits)
- "Special purpose" cash benefits or any other non-cash benefit programs

- All public benefit not enumerated in the rule will not be subject to public charge determinations
- "Monetizable" benefits where the cumulative value use does not exceed 15 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) for a household of one within any period of 12 consecutive months
- "Non-monetizable" benefits received for less than 12 months within a 36 month period. Note that months are calculated by benefit, such that receipt of two non-monetizable benefits within one month is counted as two months.
- However, if an individual receives both monetizable and non-monetizable benefits, any use of monetizable benefits and more than 9 months within a 36 month period will be counted against the applicant.

ⁱ The rule defines "public benefits" as "any government assistance in the form of cash, checks, or other forms of money transfers, or instruments and non-cash government assistance in the form of aid, services, or other relief, that is means-tested or intended to help the individual meet basic living requirements such as housing, food, utilities, or medical care." ii Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012, at 153 (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018) (to be codified at 8 C.F.R. pts. 103, 212, 213, 214, 245, and 248).

iii 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(1).

Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012, at 37 n.68 (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018) (to be codified at 8 C.F.R. pts. 103, 212, 213, 214, 245, and 248) ("Lawful permanent residents seeking entry into the United States typically are not applicants for admission, and therefore, generally are not subject to section 212(a) of the INA, 8 U.S.C. 1182(a), including INA section 212(a)(4), 8 U.S.C 1182(a)(4), but lawful permanent residents described in INA section 101(a)(13)(C), 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(13)(C), are regarded as seeking admission and generally are subject to inadmissibility grounds. ").

^v 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(2).

vi These individuals are LPRs. Individuals who apply for LPR status via Registry are not subject to a public charge determination, see Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 8 C.F.R. § 212.23(a)(11) (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018). Limited exceptions may apply, see *supra* note iv.

vii 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(3).

Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 8 C.F.R. § 212.23(a)(2) (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018).

ix 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(3).

x Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 8 C.F.R. § 212.23(a)(1) (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018).

xi 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(4).

xii Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012, at 37 n.70 ("While an alien paroled into the United States is not subject to an admission determination at the time the decision to parole the alien is made, if an alien who has been paroled into the United States is applying for an immigration benefit for which admissibility is required,

e.g. adjustment of status, the parolee will be subject to section 212(a)(4) of the Act in the context of seeking the subsequent immigration benefit."). However, certain subsets of parolees have an independent pathway to LPR status and may be exempt from public charge.

xiii 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(5).

xiv Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012, at 37 (indicated in second column, fifth row, of Table 3). A public charge determination will not be made when the decision to withhold removal is made. However, since this category of immigrant does not have an independent avenue for seeking LPR status, when individuals from this category seek a change of status, they are subject to the public charge rule depending on the pathway to status they take (e.g. a family based visa petition).

v 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(6).

xvi This category of immigrant is from the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. LPRs, including those who secured status under this law, are generally not subject to a public charge determination. Limited exceptions may apply, see supra note iv.

xvii 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(6).

- Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012, at 83 (indicated in second column, fourth row of Table 9). While there aren't many people left in this category (it's possible if a person is still appealing a very old case), they could be subject to specific public charge rules when they apply for adjustment of status unless the applicant is or was an aged, blind, or disabled individual; see 8 U.S.C. 1255a(d)(2)(B)(ii)(IV).

 xix 42 U.S.C. § 1436a(a)(7).
- xx Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 8 C.F.R. § 212.20 (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018). COFA migrants may be subject to public charge determinations when they seek to enter or reenter the US.
- ^{xxi} Memorandum from Tonya Robinson, HUD Acting General Counsel, to Julian Castro, HUD Secretary re: Eligibility of Battered Noncitizen Self-Petitioners for Financial Assistance Under Section 214 of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1980 (Dec. 15, 2016).
- xxii Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 8 C.F.R. § 212.23(a)(20) (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018) xxiii 22 U.S.C. § 7105(b)(1)(A).
- Individuals seeking T-status are exempt under the rule; see, Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 8 C.F.R. § 212.23(a)(17) (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018). T-visa holders seeking LPR status are eligible for a waiver to public charge determinations; see, Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, 8 C.F.R. § 212.23(b)(1) (published on DHS website Sept. 22, 2018). However, if a T-visa holder chooses to adjust their status outside of the T-visa pathway, they may be subject to public charge. For example, if a T-visa holder sought adjustment of status through a family-based petition rather than waiting until they are eligible via the T-visa pathway, they could be subjected to the public charge rule.
- E.g., Meredith Horowki, Housing Instability and Health: Findings from the Michigan Recession and Recovery Study, National Poverty Center Policy Brief #29 (March 2012),

http://www.npc.umich.edu/publications/policy_briefs/brief29/NPC%20Policy%20Brief%20-%2029.pdf; Matthew Desmond and Carl Gersheson, *Housing and Employment Insecurity Among the Working Poor*, Soc. Problems 1 (2016), *available at* http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mdesmond/files/desmondgershenson.sp2016.pdf?m=1452638824http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2018/01/18/peds.2017-2199 (finding that housing instability can lead to employment insecurity).

XXVII See Will Fischer, Research Shows Housing Vouchers Reduce Hardship and Provide Platform for Long-Term Gains Among

Children, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (October 7, 2015), https://www.cbpp.org/research/research-shows-housing-vouchers-reduce-hardship-and-provide-platform-for-long-term-gains; see also Linda Giannarelli et al., Reducing Child Poverty in the US: Costs and Impacts of Policies Proposed by the Children's Defense Fund (Jan. 2015), available at http://www.childrensDefenseFund.pdf.

See Kristin F. Butcher, Assessing the Long-Run Benefits of Transfers to Low-Income Families, Brookings Metro (January 2017), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/wp26 butcher transfers final.pdf (citing findings that there were long-term improvements in income and educational outcomes for individuals who received housing assistance as young children that transferred them to lower poverty neighborhoods); Sandra J. Newman et al., The Long-Term Effects of Housing Assistance on Self-Sufficiency, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (December 1999), https://www.huduser.gov/portal/Publications/pdf/longterm.pdf; Katie Hamm et al., The Trump Plan to Cut Benefits Threatens Children, Center for American Progress (Apr. 10, 2018), https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/04/10/449262/trump-plan-cut-benefit-programs-threatens-children/; Leila Schochet, Trump's https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/07/31/436377/trumps-immigration-policies-harming-american-children/; Peter A. Tatian & Christopher Snow, The Effects of Housing Assistance on Income, Earnings and Employment, 8 Cityscape: A Journal Of Policy and Development and Research 135, 158 (2005). https://www.huduser.gov/periodicals/cityscpe/vol8num2/ch7.pdf (finding evidence that benefiting from housing assistance increases income and earnings for certain groups).

^{xxix}Cesar M. Estrada, *How Immigrants Positively Affect the Business Community and U.S. Economy*, Center for American Progress (June 22, 2016), https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2016/06/22/140124/how-immigrants-positively-affect-the-business-community-and-the-u-s-economy/.