

December 19, 2025

Submitted via www.regulations.gov

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: DHS Docket No. USCIS-2025-0304, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility

This comment is submitted by three poverty and social policy researchers at the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University. Our center produces rigorous research that examines the effects of poverty on children, families, and communities in the U.S., nationally, by state, and in New York City. We also assess the impact of social policies and programs on economic well-being and opportunity.

The Department of Homeland Security’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on public charge published November 19, 2025 would rescind the 2022 public charge regulations. These regulations are important because they provide clear guidelines about which public benefit programs are counted towards public charge assessments and which are not. They also make clear that the use of programs by other family members, including children, are not considered.

We write to express concern that the proposed rescinding of these regulations will prevent individuals and families from understanding how any usage of public benefits may interact with public charge assessments or their immigration status and ultimately prevent individuals and families from being able to make fully informed decisions about application and access for public benefit programs for which they and their family members may be otherwise eligible for. We are also concerned that this has the potential to result in uncertainty, confusion, anxiety – and ultimately – chilling effects, whereby individuals and families will not apply or receive benefits due to fears around immigration and government repercussions. This would potentially affect many children and families, including U.S. citizens, given that one in four U.S. children has at least one immigrant parent.¹ Such an outcome could result in widespread negative impacts, such as increased poverty, and substantial long-term economic and societal costs – for example, up to \$14 to \$20 in negative economic costs for every \$1 lost in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food assistance benefits for families with children² – as we detail below.

Safety net programs are proven to reduce poverty and food insecurity and improve health.

The safety net kept more than 35 million people from poverty in 2024³ and is integral to families’ ability to meet their basic needs. A strong evidence base links core outcomes of the safety net – here: poverty reduction and meeting basic needs – to improved health, education, and employment outcomes in the short- and long-term. Some of the largest programs, for example, Medicaid and SNAP, are particularly important for children. Children comprise just under 50% of Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) enrollment⁴ and roughly 40% of all SNAP recipients⁵. Taking SNAP as one example, evidence demonstrates it reduces food insecurity⁶ and is linked to better health outcomes.⁷ Researchers examining the connections between SNAP enrollment and food insecurity have found that “policy efforts related to SNAP represent important public health approaches to consider for addressing food insecurity on a broad scale”.⁸ Among children, SNAP reciprocity has been linked, in the short

run, to better health outcomes, improved academic performance, and fewer crimes committed.⁹ Likewise, in the long run, those with childhood access to SNAP grow up to work and earn more and have better health.¹⁰ SNAP also functions as an important economic stabilizer during periods of recession or higher unemployment¹¹ and has a positive economic multiplier effect.¹² A 2017 review of the literature on factors that influence SNAP participation concluded that: “It is of national interest for SNAP participation to be promoted to all eligible households and implement policies to promote better nutrition”.¹³

Rescinding the 2022 public charge regulations and providing no information to replace them has the strong potential to create uncertainty, confusion, anxiety, and – ultimately – chilling effects that will reduce application and take-up for safety net programs among eligible individuals and households. Unauthorized immigrants are already ineligible for most public benefits. Legal immigrants are eligible under the criteria set out for each program; many are only eligible if they have lived in the U.S. for five years, receive disability-related assistance, or are children under 18.¹⁴ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has noted in the past, in relation to the 2022 public charge regulations, that “[r]elatively few aliens in the United States are both subject to the public charge ground of inaccessibility and eligible for the public benefits considered under the 2022 Final Rule before adjustment of status”.¹⁵ And many important safety net programs, such as Medicaid and SNAP, as well as a number of other programs, have not historically been subject to public charge assessments.¹⁶ Even so, evidence indicates that the fears around immigration-related repercussions for public benefit participation that drive chilling effects are a pervasive reality among those eligible.

Even before the proposed rescinding of the 2022 public charge regulations, surveys have shown that many immigrants believe receiving any kind of public benefit could affect their immigration status. For example, a 2017 UCLA Luskin Quality of Life Index Survey, revealed more than a third of residents in Los Angeles County report expressed concern that they themselves, a friend, or family member could be deported and, of those concerned, 80 percent reported fears of greater risk of deportation with enrollment in a government health, education, or housing program.¹⁷ As part of our long-running Poverty Tracker survey work in New York City, we surveyed New Yorkers in 2018 and found that nearly 15 percent of non-citizens have avoided public programs, and 30 percent of non-citizens have avoided a wide range of daily activities because they do not want to be asked about their immigration status.¹⁸

Taking SNAP again as a program example, studies at the U.S. national, regional, and local levels on SNAP participation have long highlighted the ways in which individuals and households forgo SNAP benefits for which they are eligible due to fears around immigration and government repercussions.¹⁹ Research has revealed lower SNAP participation rates within some racial and ethnic groups, for example Hispanic communities²⁰, when there is fear of potential deportation or jeopardizing other family members’ immigration status or eligibility for citizenship.²¹ A 2020 study of SNAP underenrollment in New York found that misinformation about whether SNAP participation among eligible U.S. citizen members (such as U.S. born children) of mixed-immigration status households could result in negative immigration outcomes for other family members resulted in an 85% lower enrollment rate among eligible individuals.²² The study authors note that there continues to be an evolving calculus for immigrant families of “risks versus benefits of using [SNAP] resources, especially as public charge criteria change”.²³

Rescinding the 2022 public charge regulations that sought to provide clear guidance and leaving an information void on the issue of public charge could further exacerbate these anxieties and fears and contribute to further reduced participation in SNAP and other safety net programs among those who are eligible.

Chilling effects have the potential to increase poverty among both immigrants and U.S. citizens. As noted earlier, one in four U.S. children has at least one immigrant parent.²⁴ But nearly 90 percent of children with immigrant parents are U.S.-born and therefore often eligible for important safety net programs, even if their parents are not.²⁵ Most of these children live in mixed-status households and are the most at-risk of losing access to public supports due to chilling effects. Our center has examined the specific impacts of chilling effects on child poverty, both nationally and in our hometown of New York City.²⁶ A New York City-specific analysis by our center in 2018 found that chilling effects from proposed public charge changes at the time could negatively affect the incomes of 400,000 to 700,000 New York City residents and push 65,000 to 115,000 New Yorkers – including 45,000 children – into poverty. This could have increased the number of poor New Yorkers pre-pandemic by as much as 5%.²⁷ In a 2019 analysis, our center found that an upper bound national estimate of a chilling effect of public charge changes could potentially result in as many as 7.9 million people – including 2.9 million U.S. citizen children – losing access to SNAP alone.²⁸ A separate 2018 analysis from our center estimated that chilling effects from public charge changes that resulted in mixed status and non-citizen households not taking up food assistance through SNAP or the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) could see 670,000 additional children fall into poverty – the vast majority of whom (approximately, 560,000) would be U.S. citizen children.²⁹ Chilling effects due to the proposed rescinding of the 2022 public charge regulations, as proposed currently, could negatively affect participation across the broader safety net, not just food assistance programs, and result in potentially larger poverty effects.

Reduced safety net participation among eligible populations could result not only in increased poverty, but also increased food insecurity, poorer health, and substantial long-term economic and societal costs. A large body of evidence shows that the safety net, including cash, near-cash, and in-kind supports, reduce poverty and improve well-being while also delivering widespread benefits to society through improved children’s health, education, and eventual employment outcomes as well as savings through reduced health, child protection, and justice-related expenditures.³⁰ Reduced access to the safety net produces the opposite effect: it has the potential to increase poverty and decrease well-being, particularly while children are young, with substantial economic and societal costs over the longer term. Research from our center shows overall poverty and child poverty increase with reduced or lost benefits.³¹ And the effects of reduced safety net participation is often felt well beyond those who lost benefits directly; local and national economies are impacted as well. Child poverty currently costs the U.S. anywhere from \$800 billion to \$1.1 trillion each year, in large part due to losses in productivity, crime, and health expenditures.³² Rigorous benefit-cost analysis from our center reveals that every \$1 lost in SNAP benefits to families with children has the potential to result in \$14 to \$20 in negative social and economic costs over the long-term due to poorer health and employment outcomes for adults, poorer health, education, and future earnings outcomes for affected children when they grow up, and increased spending on healthcare, criminal justice, and child welfare.³³ Our benefit-cost work also demonstrates the substantial long-term returns of

other public investments, such as cash supports and child care, and the long-term negative economic losses from reduced benefits or participation in these public programs and more.³⁴

For these reasons, we submit this comment to express our concern as poverty and social policy researchers over the proposed rescinding of the 2022 public charge regulations.

Sincerely,

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¹ Pillai, Pillai, & Artiga (2025) Children of Immigrants: Key Facts on Health Coverage and Care. Kaiser Family Foundation.

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