



December 10, 2018

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Office of Policy and Strategy  
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Department of Homeland Security  
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20529

**RE: Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds**

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) offers the following comments in response to **DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012**

CWLA strongly opposes the proposed public charge and urges that it be withdrawn. The proposed regulations radically alters the totality of circumstances tests in ways that would unnecessarily expand the definition of who could be deemed a public charge, and explicitly targets families with children, seniors, non-English speakers, or those with low or moderate incomes. The proposed rule would greatly undercut efforts to address hunger, illness, and poverty by deterring families who are immigrants from accessing critical public programs—those that keep people from going hungry, getting sick, or becoming homeless, and are essential to our nation’s health and well-being.

As a coalition of private and public entities and individuals dedicated to ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and their families, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) advocates for policies, best practices, and collaborative strategies that advance positive outcomes for children and youth.

CWLA was established as an outcome of the first White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children in 1909. We were proud to be part of similar conferences that were held approximately every ten years until the 1990s. We have seen the competitive, corrosive politics of our time overcome the spirit of that first White House Conference.

The National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare encourages communities and other entities to proactively seek to identify and remove systematic barriers to participation by

children, youth, and families who are immigrants. These communities should ensure that appropriate supports and services are available without regard to visa status or citizenship. We see this proposed rule as creating barriers for families who are immigrants and their children. As we pointed out in our 2018 agenda to the Administration, policies that may restrict access to human services that target some of these families including documented immigrants will only increase stress on the families and the children. The Administration must ensure that the best interests of children, including children who are U.S.-citizens living in families who are mixed-status, are held paramount in immigration policy decisions.

One in four children in the United States has at least one parent born outside the country, and approximately 88 percent of children are U.S.-born citizens. The proposed public charge rule would undercut efforts to address food insecurity among families who are immigrants, including children who are U.S. citizens. The proposed rule will increase food insecurity, which is associated with some of the most common and costly health problems in the United States: diabetes, heart disease, obesity, hypertension, chronic kidney disease, and depression. The consequences of food insecurity are especially detrimental to the health, development, and well-being of children.

Children in families of immigrants benefit when they have access to programs and services that help meet their basic needs and promote their development. Children are inherently dependent upon their parents for emotional, physical, and material support. Penalizing parents who are immigrants for using publicly funded health, nutrition, and housing programs—for which they are legally eligible—may also result in children losing these services. In addition, parents' own health and well-being affects their ability to meet children's needs. The Administration's proposed rule would have devastating consequences, with adverse effects for generations to come.

No one, no matter where they are from, should have to choose between food and family. Children thrive when they—and their family members—have nutritious food, health care, and stable housing. Restricting access to SNAP and other safety net programs will increase rates of poverty. If the proposed rule is adopted, SNAP would eliminate the health benefits participants get from the program. Based on the Census Bureau's Supplemental Poverty Measure in 2017, SNAP moved 3.4 million people out of poverty, and housing assistance moved 2.9 million people out of poverty.<sup>1</sup> SNAP is a critical source of support for millions of preschool-age children and their families. Loss of access to SNAP and other programs, including Medicaid, Medicare Part D, and housing assistance, will further exacerbate poverty and food insecurity.

The rule will prevent parents from accessing the nutrition needed for their own health and the health and development of their children. Decades of research have shown how proper nutrition in the early years is critical to healthy development and lifelong outcomes. Research also shows the inextricable link between the health of a parent and the health of their child. For those

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2017–2018 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

families who are immigrants and depend on Medicaid, without the benefit they are forced to delay doctors' visits, skip immunizations, and inability to fill prescriptions. Children suffer when parents have to make dire choices and they are at risk of irreversible harm.

In addition, the proposed rule will hurt the academic outcomes for children. Inadequate nutrition, a lack of routine medical care, and poor living situations for students contribute to disruptive behavior, inattention in class, and absentee. Brain development research shows a link between food insecurity and poor educational performance and academic outcomes for children—all of which have short- and long-term developmental, health, and economic consequences. When children do not benefit from SNAP, the result is clear: more children will arrive at child care centers or school hungry. The proposed rule would drastically strip families of basic needs and safety supports.

We have been called a nation of immigrants. CWLA also believes we can be a nation that makes children a national priority, and research shows that children thrive in healthy families. No family should have to choose between family and food. This policy does not put children and families first. We encourage the Administration to withdraw this proposed rule without delay.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine James Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris James-Brown

President and CEO