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November 15, 2018

As mayor of the city of Tucson, Arizona, I object to the proposed “public charge” rule as unconstitutional, immoral, and unworthy of our country and what we stand for.

The public charge rule would harm children, seniors, the disabled, and people with preexisting conditions.

Already, there are reports of immigrants rejecting essential benefits such as food, housing, and medical care, for themselves and their children, out of fear—even though the proposed rule has not yet come into effect. Even immigrants who would be exempt under this rule, such as refugees and asylum seekers, have been afraid to claim, or continue to claim, essential benefits to which they are entitled.

Lack of access to adequate food, housing, and medical care disproportionately impacts children, seniors, the disabled, and people with preexisting conditions.

The public charge rule would negatively impact fetal and maternal health.

A pregnant immigrant who received prenatal care through Medicaid (AHCCCS in Arizona) would have that counted against her in her application. Only labor and delivery would be exempt under the new rule. Pregnant immigrants of limited means will be afraid to seek, or continue to seek, prenatal care, as this could jeopardize their status. This puts the health and life of mother and child at risk.

The public charge rule would result in family separation.

Parents would be forced to leave children, grandparents, or other family members behind if they have a disability or preexisting condition, due to the risk of their counting against the whole family’s application for visas or permanent residency. Even more tragically, families fleeing violence and applying for refugee or asylee status would be more likely to leave their most vulnerable family members behind in dangerous circumstances, out of fear that their disability or preexisting condition would jeopardize the entire family’s safety—even though refugees and asylum seekers would be exempt under this rule.

The public charge rule would favor the wealthy over low- and middle-income families.

There are already programs in place that allow wealthy people to come into the country and invest. But wealth should not be a requirement for every immigrant. Our country should be more concerned with welcoming people who bring a desire to work and contribute, and a love of democracy, freedom, and public service, than with welcoming people based solely on how much money they have.

The public charge rule would deprive our economy of labor.

Immigrants fill a real need for workers in agriculture, hospitality, and other industry sectors. Later, they or their children often move up into more skilled jobs. Agriculture and hospitality are important sectors in Arizona's economy. But if workers are afraid that their families can never join them here, because a child has asthma or a spouse has diabetes, then they will seek a better life elsewhere.

The public charge rule would create "second class" status for U.S. citizen members of immigrant families.

Immigrant families would be afraid to claim, or continue to claim, benefits to which they are entitled, for fear of it counting against noncitizen family members. For example, U.S. citizen children who are eligible for Medicaid might go without needed healthcare, for fear that enrolling in that program would jeopardize a parent's or other family member's status. Thus, the rule would set up countless situations where there is no equal protection for U.S. citizens who happen to be members of immigrant families.

For all these reasons, I urge you to reject the proposed changes to the public charge rule.

Jonathan Rothschild
Mayor of Tucson, Arizona