

Opposing the ‘public charge’ proposal: Sample arguments

The proposal to expand the definition of “public charge” would send a strong message that America is only open to the wealthy. The new rule would evaluate immigrants not only on the basis of their income, but also their health, credit score, education and age, and penalize applicants who have used any of a wide range of “safety net” programs that help working families with health care, nutrition and housing. Indeed, even the possibility that someone might need public benefits in the future could be grounds for rejection.

We’ve compiled some sample arguments to help you as you write your comment. Think of these as extras you can dip into as needed; what’s most important is YOUR unique perspective. If you do use any of these arguments, please don’t copy them verbatim, but paraphrase/adapt them, and make sure that the majority of your comment is your original material!

The proposed rule, and the widespread fear and confusion caused by it, would cause significant and long-lasting harm to children with immigrant parents.

[Two in five](#) school-age children living in poverty in Massachusetts (under 200% of the federal poverty line, or FPL) – more than 138,000 as of 2016 – have at least one foreign-born parent. [Put a different way](#), 88% of children in immigrant families are in households below 250% of the FPL, and 31% are below 125% of the FPL. The majority of those children are U.S. citizens. If even a fraction of those parents disenroll their children from public programs for which they are eligible – because they’re forced to by the rule, or because of the widespread fear that has taken hold – thousands of children will lose crucial health care and nutrition benefits they need to grow up healthy and succeed in school.

The income expectations for immigrants are absurdly high.

The only factor that is weighed very favorably for an immigrant in the “public charge” test is having a household income above 250% of the FPL, or \$62,750 for a family of four in 2018. Yet the median household income in the U.S. is [only \\$61,372](#). This means that only immigrants with incomes higher than half of U.S. households can avoid close scrutiny as potential “public charges.” [In Massachusetts](#), 45% of the population is below 250% of the FPL, and 15% is below 125% of the FPL. (Among immigrant families, it’s 74% and 25%, respectively.) Notably, two adults working 40 hours per week each at \$15 per hour would jointly earn only \$62,400. In Massachusetts, the \$15 minimum wage goes into effect in 2023; at the current state minimum wage, \$11 per hour, two full-time workers would jointly earn \$45,760, or 182% of the FPL.

This rule would define working-class immigrants as undesirable.

For generations, immigrants and refugees – including some of America’s biggest success stories – have come to the U.S. with little or nothing and built their fortunes here. Assuming that anyone who can’t pass these tests is bound to become a burden on society is pure bigotry, not based on actual evidence.

This rule would hurt families and the communities they live in.

No one should have to choose between a chance at a green card, and keeping their family fed, healthy and sheltered. If this proposal is implemented, families will suffer, and local governments and charities will have to try to close the gap with their limited resources.

We have chosen, as a society, to protect vulnerable families, including immigrants.

Most immigrants aren’t eligible for public benefits, but when they are, it’s for good reasons. It protects public health, ensures that children are strong, healthy and ready to learn, and benefits the community as a whole. It’s also more cost-effective, as it avoids crises such as complications from untreated chronic conditions that land people in the emergency room. Penalizing families for using benefits to which they are entitled subverts the will of the people as carried out by our elected officials over several decades.