

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515

Tuesday, March 10, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20501

Dear Vice President Pence:

As the designated lead for the federal government's coronavirus response, we urge the Administration to reconsider the implementation of the *Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds* final rule, or the “public charge” rule, in light of the coronavirus outbreak. Everyone should have access to testing and treatment for coronavirus. The “public charge” rule, however, is a deterrent for symptomatic individuals to seek medical testing and treatment. Individuals infected with coronavirus who are left untested and untreated will risk spreading the disease in our communities, potentially furthering the spread of coronavirus in the United States.

The Administration created the rule. The Administration can stop it.

If you choose not to, the responsibility for the further spread of this virus is on you because we already know people will forgo treatment.

Over the past week, the number of detected coronavirus cases in the United States has grown dramatically. As of Monday, March 9th, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported more than 400 cases and over ten deaths. More cases have been identified across the country in over 30 states. As the global case count surpasses 100,000 and the death toll climbs, it is imperative that the public has adequate access to health care.

Unfortunately, the “public charge” rule is already causing people to forego healthcare. The rule allows immigration officers to assess whether immigrants seeking lawful permanent residency are a “public charge” based on whether they have used government benefits, like Medicaid. This policy creates fear and uncertainty among immigrants and citizens in mixed-status families from staying in or enrolling in Medicaid. The impact of the “public charge” rule on public health is already chilling. According to David Kadar, CEO of Parktree Community Health Center in Pomona, California, “Our experience at Parktree Community Health Center is that the public charge policy is a deterrent for people to seek help. People are foregoing medical treatment out of fear that they will be penalized, which exposes the broader community when contagious ailments go untreated.”

With individuals foregoing health care out of fear of the “public charge” rule's impact on their future, our country risks furthering the spread of coronavirus within our communities.

Individuals with coronavirus who are untested may be your colleague who sits a few desks away, the cook preparing your food, the teacher to your children, or the home attendant who cares for your elderly parent. At this critical time, the “public charge” rule is a public health threat.

Preventing the spread of coronavirus is a matter of national security. Since the Administration announced the “public charge” rule, as members of Congress, we have opposed it on moral and legal grounds. Short of rescinding it for those reasons, we strongly urge the administration to consider the health of the people across the country and at the very least temporarily suspend the implementation of the “public charge” rule.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ryan Rossy", written over a horizontal line.

Member of Congress

CC:
Director Mick Mulvaney
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20503

Acting Secretary Chad F. Wolf
Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave. SE
Washington, D.C. 20528