
Trump Administration Rule Will Harm Immigrant Families and Ill-Serve America

Statement by Robert Greenstein, President

President Trump's Department of Homeland Security today released a rule that makes extensive and deeply troubling changes in our nation's immigration policies. The rule will deny a broad set of individuals who are lawfully present in the United States and trying to build a life for themselves and their families the ability to become permanent residents. It will deny many others the ability to enter our country legally if they're not wealthy. The rule reflects a dark vision of the United States — as an unwelcoming nation that wants to keep out people who seek to join their family, work hard, and climb the economic ladder — based on the erroneous assumption that they won't contribute to our communities, our economy, and our nation.

The rule, which directs immigration officials to reject applications from individuals who seek to remain in or enter the country if they have received — or are judged more likely than not to receive in the future — any of an extensive array of public benefits that are tied to need, will make it much more difficult for many immigrants in the United States lawfully to remain here and for many seeking legal entry to come.

The rule will have numerous adverse effects. It will sow more fear in immigrant communities and almost certainly lead many immigrants who are in the United States legally as well as their family members to forgo health coverage, nutrition assistance, and housing assistance that they need and are eligible for under federal law. This fear will be even more severe if the Trump Administration adopts another rule it has under consideration, one that reportedly would use receipt of benefits under the expanded public charge definition as a basis to deport some groups of immigrants.

The rule issued today will harm children and likely keep — or newly split — apart many families. U.S.-based family members of individuals who have been denied entry into — or permission to stay in — the country under the rule would have to choose either to have their families live apart or for the entire family (which could include U.S. citizens) to leave the United States so they can live together. The rule also will hurt many workers here today who perform important but low-paid jobs, often under difficult conditions. And it will diminish many children's long-term prospects because they won't receive benefits important to their growth and development, which will weaken the future U.S. workforce.

The Administration finalized the rule despite a show of overwhelming opposition among the more than 260,000 comments submitted on it. A broad range of respected individuals and organizations expressed strong opposition to the rule, including faith leaders, such as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; hospitals and health providers, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics; business groups, such as local Chambers of Commerce; educators and educational institutions; and a bipartisan collection of federal, state, and local officials.

The rule essentially puts a price tag on obtaining lawful permanent residency in the United States, shifting it away from family-based immigration toward one restricted to people who are already relatively well-off or highly skilled when they enter the country. In doing so, it ignores our nation's centuries-long experience — one still true today — of immigrants coming to our shores, building a better life for themselves and future generations, and contributing to our economy. This rule, along with other harsh Administration executive orders and actions, is part of an effort to advance a nativist agenda that is antithetical to our nation's professed values. It should be reversed as swiftly as possible.

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