



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Advocates Deeply Concerned about ‘Public Charge’ Rule Impact in Maine following Supreme Court Decision

AUGUSTA and PORTLAND – Advocacy groups that work with immigrants in Maine expressed deep concerns about this week’s U.S. Supreme Court decision to allow the public charge rule to take effect while the legal challenges continue, saying it will hurt the health and well-being of immigrant communities in Maine.

The public charge rule is expected to have a significant “chilling effect” on low-income immigrants across the country who are qualified to seek basic nutrition, medical care, and safe housing. An estimated 20,000 non-citizens and family members in Maine with incomes less than 250% of the federal poverty limit could opt out because they’re worried getting basic supports will hurt their ability to stay in the U.S., [according to](#) the health research group Manatt.

In September, advocates had released information for immigrants in Maine around the federal ‘public charge’ rule change, which seeks to prevent certain immigrants with low incomes from becoming permanent residents of the United States. Advocates will be updating these guides based on the Supreme Court decision at ilapmaine.org/public-charge, including information about what the public charge rule is, who is impacted, which programs are included in the expanded rule, and what immigrants can do if the rule applies to them.

“Getting on a path to legal immigration is the number one goal of every immigrant family. Now with this ruling the process will disempower—limiting access to green cards for lower-income immigrants. If Maine is to thrive, immigrants must be able to continue to come to the U.S. and

to Maine without the threat of backlash for using services. It is disheartening to see policies that will disempower some populations in America,” said Mufalo Chitam, executive director of Maine Immigrants’ Rights Coalition.

Sue Roche, executive director of Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP) stressed, “Families should not stop getting help with their basic needs without talking to an immigration lawyer first. Immigrant Mainers should not be living in fear of being affected because they are getting food assistance, health care, or help with safe housing.” She also noted, “The new rule does not affect most immigrants. It does not apply to those with a humanitarian status including refugees, asylees, survivors of trafficking, domestic violence and other serious crimes.”

ILAP has already received several calls from immigrants who live in Maine, including survivors of domestic violence and trafficking, wondering if they should stop receiving benefits because they fear deportation, even though the new rule won’t impact them. Other families in Maine who will be impacted are facing potential family separation because they have low incomes.

“This Supreme Court decision allows what can only be described as a wealth test on immigration to move forward,” Kathy Kilrain del Rio, director of campaigns and health care advocacy with Maine Equal Justice said. “Immigration is an important part of the fabric of our country and our state. Mainers don’t want to see our neighbors go hungry, no matter their background or how long they’ve been here. We recognize that giving everyone a fair opportunity to get on their feet and succeed strengthens our communities and our economy.”

Following the issuance of the final rule, several lawsuits were filed across the country to stop the public charge rule. Maine has joined three other states and Washington D.C in a suit filed in the Northern District of California. Rep. Chellie Pingree has co-sponsored legislation in the House of Representatives, [H.R. 3222](#), which would withhold funds for the implementation of the rule.

The rule change is in effect nationwide while litigation continues, except in Illinois where a statewide injunction remains in place. The Department of Homeland Security has not announced a timeline for implementation.

While the pending legal challenges or legislation could ultimately stop the rule, many immigrants are already frightened by a series of policies from the Trump Administration that are targeting both documented and undocumented non-citizens, including an effort to add a citizenship question to the census, family separations at the border, and the remain in Mexico policy.

Maine Immigrants’ Rights Coalition is a nonprofit organization working to improve the legal, social and economic conditions experienced by Maine’s immigrants – enhancing their lives while strengthening Maine.

As Maine’s only state-wide immigration legal services organization, ILAP helps immigrants improve their legal status and advocates for more just and humane laws and policies.

Maine Equal Justice is a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine.

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