



Media Contacts:

Tish Gallegos, EHSD

(925) 433-1266

[tgallegos@ehsd.cccounty.us](mailto:tgallegos@ehsd.cccounty.us)

Vicky Balladares, CCHS

(925) 383-9367

[Victoria.balladares@hsd.cccounty.us](mailto:Victoria.balladares@hsd.cccounty.us)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## **Proposed Public Charge Rule Changes Signal Chilling Effect on Benefit Programs**

### **Contra Costa County Human Services, Health Services and Housing Agencies Continuing to Support Most Vulnerable, Despite Proposed Restrictions**

**Martinez, Calif.** (October 9, 2018) – The **Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD)**, **Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS)**, and **Contra Costa Housing Authority** continue to provide federally-funded benefit programs and services to community members despite a Department of Homeland Security (DHS) proposal to more broadly factor immigrants’ use of public programs into decisions related to lawful permanent status (also known as “green cards”). DHS announced last month its proposed changes to “public charge” rules that could penalize immigrants who use certain government programs. The proposal is expected to be officially published in the Federal Register on October 10.

DHS’s proposed changes expand the types of benefits that may be considered for “public charge,” a term that indicates a person who may be likely to become dependent on the government for subsistence. A public charge determination could be used to reject an immigrant’s application to keep his/her legal status to stay in the U.S. or to become a lawful permanent resident.

The proposed changes are not yet final and the Federal Register publishing sets off a 60-day period during which the public can submit comments and questions. After that, DHS will review the comments and possibly make revisions before issuing a final rule. This process is expected to stretch into 2019.

“At this time, there are no new laws affecting the way EHSD determines eligibility,” explained EHSD Director Kathy Gallagher. “This unnecessary and cruel proposal purports to

change long-standing federal policy. EHSD is committed to supporting the needs of all community members who are eligible for our services, regardless of immigration status, and there are no changes to our processes, rules, or eligibility standards pertaining to immigration. We encourage families to continue to seek the services they need.”

Gallagher emphasizes that EHSD staff is dedicated to supporting all customers with dignity, and ensuring access to resources that protect and empower individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency. While there is no connection between the intended changes and eligibility determination for human services programs, the potential impact is that immigrants needing or receiving benefits may be reluctant to seek necessary support for their families, if receiving it is thought to pose a risk to their ability to secure lawful permanent status.

The rule changes could impact many under-resourced working immigrant families. It has long been thought that work supports like health care and nutrition help families thrive and remain productive. In some cases, the proposal may lead families to feel they must choose between getting food, health care, housing assistance, and services they need, and obtaining the citizenship that they are legally on track to achieve. These changes will likely have a chilling effect, causing uncertainty and pushing many out of the social safety net and services they are eligible to receive.

“Healthy people make healthy communities, and we’re worried this rule change will discourage people from accessing health care services or services that they depend on to be healthy,” said Contra Costa Health Services Director Anna Roth.

DHS’ revised policy “Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds” proposes:

- Expanding the list of programs that could be considered in determining the risk of “public charge.”
- Weighing programs such as Medi-Cal (except emergency care), CalFresh (“food stamps”), and housing assistance (public housing or Section 8 housing vouchers) as public charge factors. Under current law, these are not considered to be public charge.
- Decreasing the number of programs excluded from the public charge rules. However, public education (including Head Start), national school lunch programs, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Veteran’s benefits would be among the *excluded* programs and would NOT be considered for public charge.

“The U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's rules have long prohibited housing authorities from providing assistance to undocumented immigrants,” said Contra Costa Housing Authority Executive Director Joseph Villarreal. “Threatening the housing stability of legal immigrants seems especially counterproductive as our region battles a rise in homelessness and a lack of affordable housing for all income levels. Investing in housing and other essential needs keeps adults employed, children in school and prevents families from living on the street.”

During the 60-day public comment period, EHSD, CCHS and the Housing Authority encourage members of the public and organizations with concerns about the public charge rule change to submit their input through the [Federal Register](#). The departments are further evaluating the potential effect of the proposed rule changes on Contra Costa community members and will offer additional information as it becomes available.

All three agencies are advising individuals and families to review the new rules as they apply to their particular circumstances, and decide the best course of action. The departments recommend resources such as the Immigration Legal Resource Center (ILRC), Stand Together Contra Costa, Catholic Charities, and 211.org.

EHSD, CCHS and the Housing Authority continue adhering to the core values that guide each department in supporting its customers, staff and partner organizations, and in delivering the programs each is entrusted to administer in order to care for our most vulnerable community members.

### **Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services**

Employment & Human Services (EHSD) partners with the community to deliver quality services to ensure access to resources that support, protect, and empower individuals and families to achieve self-sufficiency. Based on the core values of delivering an exceptional customer experience, encouraging open communication, embracing change, practicing ethical behavior, and embracing diversity, EHSD envisions Contra Costa County will continue to be a thriving community where all individuals and families can be healthy, safe, secure and self-sufficient. More information about EHSD is available at [www.ehsd.org](http://www.ehsd.org).

### **Contra Costa Health Services**

The mission of Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) is to care for and improve the health of all people in Contra Costa County with special attention to those who are most vulnerable to health problems.

### **Contra Costa Housing Authority**

The mission of the Contra Costa Housing Authority is to provide high quality affordable housing solutions and to promote self-sufficiency for low-income people of Contra Costa County.

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