



HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Public Charge FAQ

You may have heard about federal policy changes that could affect immigrants' use of public benefits (government programs that may help you pay for food, housing, other living expenses, and health care such as MassHealth). The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) public charge rule change has been finalized and will go into effect on October 15.

Please note that this FAQ is only focused on health care public benefits, this does not cover cash benefits, SNAP, long-term care or housing benefits.

Q: What is public charge?

A: Public charge is a term used by U.S. immigration officials to refer to a person who is considered primarily dependent, or more likely than not to become dependent, on the government for financial or material support. This determination can be used to deny admission for a non-immigrant visa, green card, or status adjustment. Public charge is only an issue when you first apply for a green card through a family petition or for certain visas, such as a student or fiancée visa. Public charge and the enrollment into public benefits is not a consideration when you apply for citizenship or renew your green card. However, public charge could impact your ability to petition for a family member to come to the U.S. in the future.

Q: What just happened that is making the news cover public charge and why are people in my community talking about it?

A: The Trump administration is making changes to the federal regulations around how they decide if someone is a public charge. Federal immigration officials in every state will have to use these new considerations to determine if your enrollment into public benefits, along with other new factors, could be a public charge.

Q: Do I have to drop my coverage now that the public charge rule changed? (See page 2 for screening help)

A: You do not need to drop coverage right now; the rule will not go into effect for 60 days (October 15, 2019). There are legal challenges to these regulations, and we are hoping these challenges will delay the start past October 15. However, we will not have information on that for some time. After October 15, the federal government will look at people's use of public benefits when they are reviewing people's new immigration applications and status adjustments (i.e., moving from a visa to a green card).

HCFA does not offer immigration counseling and is not responsible for the immigration advice provided by any of the groups listed.

This rule change only applies to certain immigration statuses, and we advise you to check with an immigration counselor/attorney to discuss your family's situation. Many immigrants are exempt from the public charge test, including US citizens, green card holders, pregnant women and children, refugees, asylees, and some other categories.

Q: Will my immigration status be harmed because I am currently covered by a state or federal health insurance program?

A: Benefits you are currently getting right now will NOT be counted towards the public charge determination. There is the possibility enrolling in certain public benefits could impact your family's status starting on October 15th if your family applies for new immigration applications or adjustments of statuses to legal permanent resident status after that date.

Q: What can I do for health care if I drop coverage?

A: There are community health centers where you may be able to pay for care out-of-pocket and on a sliding-fee-scale (www.massleague.org). You can privately pay for health insurance through the Health Connector (www.mahealthconnector.org).

Q: Who can I talk to about my immigration case?

A: Please see the attached regional list of organizations that provide immigration counseling. Keep in mind that because this language is so new, immigration counselors may not have been trained yet on the changes covered in the new rule.

Insurance coverage that public charge will not apply to:

- Employer Sponsored Insurance
- Medicare
- COBRA
- Veterans Administration coverage
- Tricare
- Qualified Health Plan through the Health Connector
- Individual private insurance
- Student health insurance
- ConnectorCare
- Certain MassHealth Family Assistance members
- MassHealth Limited
- IDEA and school-based services

Populations Exempt:

- Pregnant women (including 60 days after)
- Children under 21

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- Active military members and their family

Immigration statuses that public charge will not apply to:

- Refugees/asylum status (some populations seek adjustment may need to speak with a counselor)
- Permanent residents/green card holders
- U and T Visa (victims of trafficking and criminal activity)
- DACA status
- TPS status
- Temporary status
- No documentation (undocumented)

To learn more about changes regarding the public charge determination and how to be part of the campaign to oppose these changes, you can send an email to organizing@hcfama.org.

Attached is a list of organizations that are trusted in the community and provide free immigration services. Some of these organizations may have limited capacity and may not accept new cases, please call first to ensure that they can help you.

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Immigrant Resources in Greater Boston

| Legal Services | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD)/Fenway Neighborhood Service Center | 714 Parker Street Roxbury, MA 02120 | Ph: (617) 445-6000 |
| Agencia ALPHA | 62 Northampton Street, #203 Boston, MA 02118 | Ph: (617) 541-4455 x16 |
| Catholic Charities Refugee and Immigrant Services | 275 West Broadway South Boston, MA 02127 | Ph: (617) 464-8100 |
| Centro Presente | 12 Bennington Street, Suite 202 East Boston, MA 02145 | Ph: (857) 256-2981 |
| Community Legal Services and Counseling Center | 1 West Street Cambridge, MA 02139 | Ph: (617) 661-1010 |
| East Boston Ecumenical Community Council | 50 Meridian Street, Suite B1 East Boston, MA 02128 | Ph: (617) 567-2750 |
| Greater Boston Legal Services (Immigration Unit) | 197 Friend Street Boston, MA 02114 | Ph: (617) 371-1234 (800) 323-3205 |
| Harbor Communities Overcoming Violence * for domestic abuse survivors | 148 Shawmut Street Chelsea, MA 02150 | Ph: (617) 884-9799 |
| Irish International Immigrant Center | One State Street, Suite 800 Boston, MA 02109 | Ph: (617) 542-7654 |
| Justice Bridge Legal Center UMASS School of Law, Boston Office | 67 Battery March Street, Lower Level Boston, MA 02110 | Ph: (617) 860-3414 |
| Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) * **for unaccompanied minors | 155 Seaport Boulevard, 5th Floor Boston, MA 02210 | Ph: (617) 207-4138 |
| Political Asylum/Immigration Representation (PAIR) Project | 98 North Washington Street, Suite 106 Boston, MA 02114 | Ph: (617) 742- 9296 |
| Project Citizenship | 4 Faneuil S. Market Building Suite 4025 Boston, MA 02109 | Ph: (617) 694-5949 |
| Victim Rights Law Center ** for domestic abuse survivors | 115 Broad Street, 3rd Floor Boston, MA 02110 | Ph: (617) 399-6720, x19 |

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Immigrant Resources in MetroWest/Central Mass

| Legal Services | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| Ascentria Care Alliance | 11 Shattuck Street Worcester, MA 01605 | Ph: (774) 243-3100 |
| Catholic Charities of Worcester (CCW) | 10 Hammond St. Worcester, MA 01610 | Ph: 508-860-2261 |
| Central West Justice Center An Affiliate of Community Legal Aid | 405 Main Street, Fourth Floor Worcester, MA 01608 | Ph: (508) 755-3260/ 855-CLA-LEGAL |
| MetroWest Legal Services | 63 Fountain Street, Suite 304 Framingham, MA 01702 | Ph: (508) 620-1830/ 800-696-1501 |

Immigrant Resources in Western Massachusetts

| Legal Services | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| Ascentria Care Alliance | 94 North Elm Street, Suite 401 Westfield, MA 01085 | Ph: (413) 787-0725 |
| Berkshire Immigrant Center | 88 South Street Pittsfield, MA 01201 | Ph: (413) 445-4881 |
| Center for New Americans | 42 Gothic Street Northampton, MA 01060 | Ph: (413) 587-0084 |
| Community Legal Aid | One Monarch Place, Suite 400 Springfield, MA 01144 | Ph: (413) 781-7814 |

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Immigrant Resources in Northeastern MA/North Shore

| Legal Services | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| Northeast Legal Aid- Lawrence | 50 Island Street, #203A Lawrence, MA 01840 | Ph: (978) 458-1465 |
| Northeast Legal Aid- Lowell | 35 John Street, Suite 302 Lowell, MA 01852 | Ph: (978) 458-1465 |
| Northeast Legal Aid- Lynn | 181 Union Street, 201A Lynn, MA 01901 | Ph: (978) 458-1465 |
| Refugee and Immigrant Assistance Center-Lynn | 20 Wheeler St. Suite. 401 Lynn, MA, 01902 | Ph: (617) 238-2430 |
| Freedom Hill Community Church | 77 Kennedy Dr. Malden, MA 02148 | Ph: (781) 480-4179 |
| Agencia ALPHA | 62 Northampton Street, #203 Boston, MA 02118 | Ph: (617) 541-4455 x16 |
| Centro Presente | 12 Bennington Street, Suite 202 East Boston, MA 02145 | Ph: (857) 256-2981 |
| Community Legal Services and Counseling Center | 1 West Street Cambridge, MA 02139 | Ph: (617) 661-1010 |
| East Boston Ecumenical Community Council | 50 Meridian Street, Suite B1 East Boston, MA 02128 | Ph: (617) 567-2750 |
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| Legal Services (cont.) | | |
|---|---|-------------------------|
| Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) * **for unaccompanied minors | 155 Seaport Boulevard, 5th Floor Boston, MA 02210 | Ph: (617) 207-4138 |
| Legal Justice Access, Inc. | 60 Island Street Suite 105 Lawrence, MA 01840 | Ph: (857) 264-2381 |
| Political Asylum/Immigration Representation (PAIR) Project | 98 North Washington Street, Suite 106 Boston, MA 02114 | Ph: (617) 742- 9296 |
| Children's Law Center of Massachusetts ** for children and youth | 298 Union Street, 2nd Floor Lynn, MA 01901 | Ph: (781) 581-1977 |
| Victim Rights Law Center ** for domestic abuse survivors | 115 Broad Street, 3rd Floor Boston, MA 02110 | Ph: (617) 399-6720, x19 |

Immigrant Resources in Southeastern Mass and Cape Islands

| Legal Services | | |
|---|---|--------------------|
| Catholic Social Services of Fall River | 1600 Bay Street/ PO Box M/So. Station Fall River, MA 02724 | Ph: (508) 674-4681 |
| | 261 South St. Hyannis, MA 02601 | Ph: (508) 771-6771 |
| | 238 Bonney St. New Bedford, MA 02744 | Ph: (508) 997-7337 |
| Justice Center of Southeast Massachusetts, LLC | 231 Main Street, #201 Brockton, MA 02301 | Ph: (508) 586-2110 |
| University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth – Immigration Law Project | 33 Faunce Corner Road Dartmouth, MA 02747 | Ph: (508) 985-1174 |

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