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Grace Meng

Congress of the United States

Sixth District, New York

December 6, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20520

RE: DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

I write to express my strong opposition to the proposed rule, "Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds," published by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in the Federal Register on October 10, 2018. The changes outlined in the proposed rule will result in dire outcomes for thousands of families, including those with U.S. citizen children. If enacted, the proposed change will force families to choose between receiving government benefits essential to maintaining their basic health, or foregoing these benefits so that they may maintain their eligibility for immigration admission, which is their only chance at keeping members of their families together.

On May 7, 2018, eighty-five Members of Congress and I wrote a joint letter to DHS to reconsider the proposed change. As we stated in the joint letter, this is a "back-door attempt to circumvent Congress" by creating a new definition "to bar immigrants from obtaining legal entry or permanent resident status" in the United States. The goal of this proposal is not to prevent immigrants from taking advantage of federal benefits since Congress provides specific requirements to be recipients of these programs. Instead, it is an attempt to restrict legal immigration. I again emphasize that we should not be "leveraging public health and education to deny immigration benefits and keep families apart."

Moreover, this radical attempt to redefine immigration will have serious consequences for the effected children, most of whom are U.S. citizens. The Fiscal Policy Institute concludes that an estimated nine million children (under 18 years old) nationwide will be affected through the loss of public federal benefits or placed under stress and confusion because of the lingering uncertainty around whether their family members will be able to stay together. Eighty-seven percent of these children are U.S. citizens. This is a serious issue because American children may not be receiving the basic nutrients and care they need to develop and grow at a critical point in

their lives. Lack of housing assistance, food assistance, medical care, and other essential benefits can lead to lower school performances and more missed school days, creating long term consequences beyond the child that could span for generations.

According to an analysis conducted by the New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Department of Social Services, and the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity on the effects of the change to the definition of public charge on New York City, the proposed change risks forcing up to 75,000 immigrant New Yorkers to opt out of their benefits to which they are legally entitled to and need to support themselves. Additionally, up to 400,000 immigrant New Yorkers may be at risk for future negative immigration consequences due to their age, health, education, employment history, and other factors that are often outside of their control. In reality, this could translate to food insecurity, increased health problems and costs, homelessness, poverty, and much more in New York City. This proposal will cause real harm to real lives.

The drastic impact on families is grave as they sacrifice important benefits in fear that it will jeopardize their likelihood of obtaining permanent residency in the U.S. But, as families and their communities forgo benefits, New York City as a whole will suffer economically as well. Roughly, this change is estimated to cost up to \$420 million dollars annually as current benefit holders withdraw from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or "food stamps"), Cash Assistance, and Supplemental Security Income and the state supplement (SSI/SSP). Disenrollment from these programs will hurt the economy through decreased federal funds, loss of jobs, and reduced local spending.

I am proud to represent Queens, New York, the home to nearly 1.1 million immigrants, the most linguistically diverse area in the world, the largest naturalized immigrant population in New York City, and the largest U.S. permanent resident population in New York City—a city in which 62 percent of households have at least one immigrant member and over 150 languages are spoken. The immigrant community is a defining component of the borough and city I represent, and my community is enriched by this diversity. I hope you too will recognize the importance of immigrant communities and reconsider this proposed change.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Grace Meng
Member of Congress