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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

COMMITTEE ON RULES
APPROPRIATIONS
TRANSPORTATION, AND HOUSING AND
URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND
RELATED PROGRAMS
FINANCIAL SERVICES AND
GENERAL GOVERNMENT
REGIONAL WHIP

February 28, 2020

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20501

Dear Vice President Pence:

As the designated lead for the federal government's coronavirus response, I urge the Administration to reconsider the implementation of the *Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds* final rule, or "public charge" rule, in light of the coronavirus outbreak. The "public charge" rule is a deterrent for symptomatic individuals to seek medical testing and treatment. Individuals infected with coronavirus who are left untested and untreated will be contagious agents of the disease in our communities, potentially furthering the spread of coronavirus in the United States.

The Administration created the rule. The Administration can stop it.

If you choose not to, the responsibility for the further spread of this virus is on you because we already know people will forgo treatment.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has expressed that the United States is unlikely to be spared in the spread of the coronavirus disease 2019. On February 25, 2020, the Director of the CDC National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Nancy Messonnier, said: "It's not a question of if this will happen but when this will happen." It is therefore critical that the public has adequate access to health care for when the coronavirus hits the United States.

Unfortunately, the "public charge" rule is already causing people to forego healthcare. The rule allows immigration officers to assess whether immigrants seeking lawful permanent residency are a "public charge" based on whether they have used government benefits, like Medicaid. This policy places constraints on immigrants and citizens in mixed-status families who would otherwise stay in or enroll in Medicaid. Already, the impact of the "public charge" rule on public health has been chilling. According to David Kadar, CEO of Parktree Community Health Center in my district, California-35: "Our experience at Parktree Community Health Center is that the public charge policy is a deterrent for people to seek help. People are foregoing medical treatment out of fear that they will be penalized, which exposes the broader community when contagious ailments go untreated."

The "public charge" rule will undoubtedly cause individuals across the country to also avoid seeking testing and treatment of the coronavirus. With individuals foregoing health care out of

fear of the “public charge” rule on their future, our country risks furthering the spread of coronavirus within our communities. Individuals with coronavirus who are untested may be your colleague who sits a few desks away, the cook serving your food, the teacher to your children, or the home attendant who cares for your elderly parent. At this critical time, the “public charge” rule is a public health threat.

Preventing the spread of coronavirus is a matter of national security. Since the Administration announced the “public charge” rule, I have opposed it on moral and legal grounds. Short of rescinding it for those reasons, I strongly urge the administration to consider the health of the people across the country and at the very least temporarily suspend the implementation of the “public charge” rule.

Respectfully,



Norma J. Torres

CC:

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