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Ann Toback is CEO of the Workers Circle.

Photo courtesy of Workers Circle

OPINION: 'Public charge' change could be public health catastrophe

By Ann Toback
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Since its earliest days in office, the Trump administration has been working aggressively to ensure an America that only benefits the white and wealthy — employing every opportunity to keep immigrants from accessing programs and benefits they are legally entitled to.

The administration's changes to the public charge provision, which impact some immigrants' ability to get a green card based on their use of government social services, have set our country up for a public health catastrophe.

Confusion and fear generated by the public charge rule have had a demonstrable chilling effect on immigrants' willingness to access public health services whether or not they are directly covered by the rule.

Now with the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in our country, community well-being and health is directly dependent on trust and cooperation with our public health care system. Those who most need our support have been made even more vulnerable thanks to the public charge rule.

Our country's leadership should be positioned to implore people — all people — to seek out services, treatment and medical care. Instead, immigrants, who fear that seeking government assistance will put their status in jeopardy, are refusing care in droves — for themselves and their family members.

We remain hopeful that the court system will put an end to the President's draconian changes to the public charge rule. Until then, we will stand with and speak out for those who feel excluded and marginalized by this administration.

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