

## Alameda County Social Services Agency: Frequently Asked Questions #2– Proposed Changes to Public Charge Rule and Participation in Public Benefits

*This information is current and accurate as of June 20, 2018.*

### 1. What is public charge?

“Public charge” is a test used by US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to decide who they will let into the United States, who can renew certain temporary visas, and who can get Lawful Permanent Residency (LPR)—also known as a green card. Only people who cannot support themselves are considered “public charges.” **There is no public charge test when you apply for naturalization.**

### 2. Are there any immediate impacts to the benefits offered by the Social Services Agency (SSA)?

No. If you are eligible to receive CalFresh, CalWORKs, General Assistance, In-Home Supportive Services, Medi-Cal, child care subsidies and other entitlement programs now, **you are still eligible to receive those benefits.** We continue to process all applications and renewals, and provide benefits to you just as we did before.

### 3. I have heard there may be changes to how my application for naturalization or a green card will be considered if my family or I uses any public assistance programs. Is this true?

No, not at this time. Immigration officials cannot consider whether you or your family receive a public benefit when deciding if you can become a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Despite what you may have heard or read, the federal government has not made any changes to how use of public benefits affects your application for lawful permanent residency. Use of non-cash benefits like health care coverage (Medi-Cal), food assistance (CalFresh), education, job training, and child care services **have no impact, and will not count against anyone applying** for lawful permanent residency, or prevent anyone from entering the country at this time.

### 4. I am concerned about the privacy of my information. How is the information provided about myself or my family used by the Social Services Agency?

SSA uses the information you give us only to see if you are eligible for benefits. The federal government does not access our systems for immigration enforcement action.

We may need to verify the information you provide on a public benefit application with the federal government, but only to confirm your eligibility to receive services. We do not share any information about household members who are not applying for benefits, just the information provided about a financial sponsor.

### 5. I have questions about how participating in public benefit programs could affect my immigration status or naturalization. Can the Social Services Agency provide me with assistance?

No, SSA cannot provide legal guidance specific to you and your family. We encourage you to seek advice from a reputable nonprofit immigration service provider, such as the **Alameda County Immigration Legal and Education Partnership (ACILEP) at (510) 241-4011, Bay Area Legal Aid (510) 663-4744, Catholic Charities of the East Bay at (437-1554), or contact the Health Consumer Alliance at (888) 804-3536.**

**6. In 2017, the President released executive orders on immigration and enforcement. Did these announcements change immigrants' and legal residents' ability to participate in public benefits like Medi-Cal, CalFresh and CalWORKs?**

No. If you or your family are now eligible for public benefits or services, you are still eligible. This includes all rules affecting immigrants.

**7. What kind of changes is the Social Services Agency preparing for?**

A draft proposal to expand the “public charge” rules to include some of the non-cash assistance, like CalFresh, In-Home Supportive Services, Medi-Cal, and child care subsidies and other entitlement programs, was reported in the news. Again, public charge is a term used in immigration law to describe someone who is likely to rely on government benefits, such as CalWORKs or long-term institutionalization. **Nothing official has been released or has gone into effect.**

We are closely tracking all actions at the federal level. You will be informed if there are any changes that affect you or your family.

Keep in mind that big changes to public programs like Medi-Cal, CalFresh and CalWORKs do not happen overnight; they often require approval by Congress and federal agencies that take time to go into effect.

**8. Will discontinuing my benefits remove my information from California's systems?**

No. State and local computer systems keep a record of your old case, so we will continue to have your information on file. Choosing to stop your benefits will result in loss of critical health care coverage, cash and food assistance.

**9. Where can I get additional information on public charge?**

Additional information can be found at the [National Immigration Law Center](#) or [CA Immigrant Policy Center](#).