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NEW SURVEY: Three Out of Four Immigrant Families Unaware Harmful Public Charge Policy Overturned

WASHINGTON — A [poll released Wednesday](#) by the Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) coalition finds that a large share of immigrant families are unaware the Biden Administration has [reversed](#) a Trump Administration policy that put immigration applications at risk if lawfully-present immigrants used safety net programs for which they qualified. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reversed the 2019 “public charge” regulations in March, but experts cite the policy’s persistent chilling effect as a contributing factor to the pandemic’s disproportionate impact on immigrant families of color, including vaccination disparities. The new research validates these concerns, showing that 78% of immigrant families were unaware the policy had changed.

“The reversal of the Trump Administration public charge regulations was a critical first step toward ending the pandemic,” said Eddie Carmona, PIF director. “But this poll confirms that the Biden Administration, and all of us, have much more work to do.”

The poll surveyed 1,000 individuals nationwide, most Latino or Asian American / Pacific Islander. Respondents have at least one family member who is not a U.S. citizen. The survey found that:

- Only 22% of immigrant families had heard “a lot” about DHS’ action to reverse the Trump Administration public charge policy
- But 50% said that knowledge made them more likely to use safety net programs when necessary
- About half (46%) of respondents whose families needed help during the pandemic declined to apply because of immigration concerns.

The poll was completed for the PIF coalition by [BSP Research](#), which has also overseen large public opinion surveys measuring the impact of COVID-19 on Latino communities. The research was funded by Share Our Strength’s [No Kid Hungry campaign](#).

More than 1 in 4 U.S. children live with at least one immigrant parent. [Research by the nonpartisan Urban Institute](#) shows the harsh changes to the public charge policy generated confusion and fear among eligible immigrant families in 2020. As a result, immigrants and citizens alike, declined to access programs designed to help feed, house and keep their children

healthy, despite facing significant hardship. And both [research](#) and [expert analysis](#) indicate that the public charge policy has undermined COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

The Trump Administration changes to the public charge policy, just a month before the pandemic hit, put “green card” applications at risk if immigrants used Medicaid, SNAP benefits, or “Section 8” housing assistance. The policy denied families of color access to critical lifelines, widened health and economic disparities, and undermined the nation’s resilience. The research released today confirms that effective communication to immigrant families is essential to effective pandemic response and recovery.

“COVID-19 has exposed all the ways inequitable laws, policies, and systems harm immigrant families and our country,” said Emily Stewart, executive director of the health equity nonprofit Community Catalyst, a member of the PIF steering committee. “To protect us all, the federal government must redouble its efforts to make sure every immigrant family knows that the Biden Administration has taken critical steps to protect their health. We applaud the Biden Administration’s reversal of the Trump Administration public charge rule and urge them to advance responsible public charge regulations that shield families against abuses like those of the Trump Administration.”

The survey was in the field from September 1-22, 2021. BSP screened in only people who are immigrants or have at least one close family member who is an immigrant, and the poll includes 1,000 respondents at a confidence interval of +/- 3.1%.

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