



August 23, 2021

Senior Deputy Director Kate Massey  
Medical Services Administration  
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

Director Elizabeth Hertel  
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services

Attorney General Dana Nessel  
Department of Attorney General

*Sent via email*

Dear Senior Deputy Director Massey, Director Hertel, and Attorney General Nessel:

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to ensuring the health and well-being of all residents of Michigan, including immigrants with various statuses, throughout the many phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also appreciate the advocacy of the Attorney General, who in spring of 2020 [joined in calling on the Trump administration](#) to delay its “public charge” rule changes and emphasized the rule’s harmful impact in the midst of the pandemic. Now, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has [asked for your help](#) in continuing to improve health care access for Michigan’s immigrant families, by engaging with state and local nonprofits to inform families that the Trump-era “public charge” regulations are no longer in effect. We are writing to encourage you to take action in response to [HHS’ request](#), to request an opportunity to meet with you to discuss the importance of action, and to offer our support and partnership in this effort.

As you know, the [Trump-era public charge regulations](#) deterred the families of lawfully-present immigrants from using needed health care and social service programs by putting immigration applications at risk if immigrants used specific programs. Research has shown that this policy [weakened the nation’s health and economic response to the pandemic](#) and [amplified the racial health disparities of COVID-19](#).

Recent research demonstrates that this “chilling effect” persists months after President Biden reversed this policy. A July 2021 [Kaiser Family Foundation analysis](#) found the Trump administration’s public charge regulation continues to drive health disparities. And a recent [survey by the African American Research Collaborative and the Commonwealth Fund](#) showed that immigration concerns continue to undermine COVID-19 vaccination rates among sizeable shares of people who’d heard about potential immigration consequences.

This aligns with our experience working with Michigan immigrant families and has driven our continued advocacy on their behalf. Many have not heard that the changes to the public charge rule have been



reversed and concerns persist that any connection to government health care programs — including COVID-19 vaccination — could threaten immigration status or applications.

HHS understands that this information and trust gap puts our whole state at risk and that we must all work together to protect Michigan’s public health and promote available public programs for those who are eligible, no matter whether they are immigrants or are Michigan-born. That’s why HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra has [challenged state leaders](#) and local partners, “to spread this message far and wide: we are here to help and the public charge rule is no longer in effect.”

We are asking you to take action in response to Secretary Becerra’s call by issuing public-facing statements and materials regarding the current status of the public charge rule. If you do, we will be right beside you. We are also requesting the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these actions and their importance for the health and well-being of immigrant families in Michigan. Our organizations can help you to develop and disseminate materials that will resonate with immigrant families, amplify your immigrant-inclusive message, and craft strategies for effective outreach. In fact, the [Protecting Immigrant Families – Michigan website](#) serves as a hub of existing information and community education materials for families, advocates, and state officials alike.

But government must help lead this public engagement effort, and the time for action is now. With COVID-19 infection rates on the rise nationwide and the deadly “Delta” variant driving the trend, delay will be detrimental to all Michiganders, further widen racial health disparities, and undermine Michigan’s economic recovery.

Our nation’s highest health authorities have [asked for your leadership](#) in mitigating the danger of a known health threat. We urge you to act now to protect immigrant families and our whole state and look forward to discussing this with you.

Sincerely,

Protecting Immigrant Families – Michigan:

African Bureau for Immigration and Social Affairs (ABISA)  
Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services (ACCESS)  
Detroit Hispanic Development Corporation (DHDC)  
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center (MIRC)  
Michigan League for Public Policy  
Voces