

What to Know About School Meals and “Public Charge”

This information is accurate as of 1/30/20

This document is meant to give parents and guardians information about a change to “public charge” as it relates to school meals. For more information and for immigration and legal counseling, please contact an immigration lawyer.

WHAT IS “PUBLIC CHARGE”?

“Public charge” is an immigration law test used when reviewing applications of immigrants applying to enter the United States or receive a green card. Participation in certain programs can negatively weigh against an individual’s application. A recently finalized change to this rule, which took effect on October 15th, expands the list of criteria to include programs including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Officials will only look at whether a person used these benefits **after** October 15, 2019.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- 1** Receiving school, afterschool, or summer meals does not affect “public charge” determination. Please submit your school meals application, because it will not impact “public charge” for children or their guardians.
- 2** Attending public school or receiving other educational assistance including Headstart, Pell Grants, or aid for elementary, secondary, and higher education does not affect “public charge” determination.
- 3** Receiving WIC benefits also does not affect “public charge” determination.
- 4** If you or your child is a Legal Permanent Resident or a U.S. citizen, they may continue to receive benefits for all programs for which they are eligible including SNAP, MassHealth and other non-cash benefits. This will not impact the “public charge” determination for immigrant parents
- 5** The rule does not apply to everyone: For example, U.S. citizens, and certain groups of immigrants, such as refugees, asylees and battered immigrants will continue to be exempt from public charge.

Talk to a lawyer if you have a green card and plan to leave the U.S. for an extended period or if you have any questions about “public charge” effects for you or your family.