



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

SENATOR KAREN E. SPILKA
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December 10, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, SW
Washington, D.C. 20528

Re: Proposed Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds Rule (Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012)

Dear Secretary Nielson:

I write as President of the Massachusetts State Senate to voice my strong opposition to the public charge proposal. This is an attempt to make immigration exclusionary by selecting who comes in and does not come into our country—a country that was literally built by immigrants. Excluding groups because they are considered vulnerable, such as those with disabilities, lower income, or lower levels of education, as well as the young and the elderly, is against our values as a country. Hundreds of thousands of equally vulnerable immigrants have overcome challenges to raise generations of thriving Americans.

When my grandfather was a young teenager, he had no choice but to leave Russia in 1906 when he saw his friend murdered by the state for opposing and protesting the Czar's policies—activities that my grandfather participated in as well. My grandfather's safe passage to the United States prepared the way for my father to serve this country in World War II. Despite obstacles, including my father's untreated post-war mental illness, my parents worked hard to educate their children and send us to college. Our story is one of the success of the American dream.

The impact of the proposed rule is concerning to me particularly as it relates to Massachusetts. Proactively seeking to exclude immigrants who are likely deemed to be a 'public charge' means preventing the children of these immigrants the opportunity to help build a thriving economy here in the Commonwealth. Furthermore, expanding the definition to include anyone who is likely to become a public charge by looking at the "totality of the circumstances," while also expanding public programs being considered, easily targets the most marginalized. This is not what this great country stands for.

The proposed rule has already created great fear among my constituents, many of whom are from foreign countries and have used public programs in the past. Making this past reliance on public assistance one of the factors to be considered is unjust and counterproductive, as many residents have done so while going on to make significant contributions to our economy. At the same time, the fear caused by this proposal has caused many families to give up seeking benefits altogether, with the result being that their children are more likely to experience health issues, struggle in school, and experience less resiliency. Families that fall behind financially and experience poor health outcomes negatively impact the health of our wider communities. With this cycle, we are moving in the exact opposite direction of everything I have ever stood for, and fought for, as a legislator.

I can write to you today as President of the Massachusetts State Senate because of the United States' generous immigration policy. My vulnerable teenage grandfather found safe refuge from a murderous regime here. He survived. His family thrived. I am cognizant every day of the fact that my story could have been much different—or nonexistent—if my family could not get a foothold in America because they were not considered wealthy enough for entry. Freedom should not be means tested. Families should not live in fear because they need help.

It is my fervent hope that we give the next generation of immigrant families the same opportunity mine had to participate in our economy and in our civic life. Many will rise to the occasion, serving our country as my father did and creating a stronger America from one generation to the next. For this and the reasons listed above, I urge the Trump Administration to withdraw this proposal and leave the definition of 'public charge' unchanged.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen E. Spilka". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Karen" being the most prominent part.

Senate President Karen E. Spilka
2nd Middlesex & Norfolk District