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Hawaii Attorney General joins Coalition Calling on Trump Administration to Delay “Public Charge” Rule During COVID-19 Outbreak

HONOLULU – Hawaii Attorney General Clare E. Connors joined a coalition of 17 attorneys general, led by Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson, calling on the Trump Administration to delay its “public charge” rule while the COVID-19 outbreak and response is ongoing.

Federal law allows many lawful immigrants to apply for public benefits, such as health care, if they have been in the country for at least five years. The new rule creates a “bait-and-switch” — if immigrants use the public assistance to which they are legally entitled, they would jeopardize their chances of later renewing their visa or becoming permanent residents. [Washington is co-leading](#) a multistate coalition challenging this rule, but an appeals court declined to stay the rule while the case is pending.

“The Public Charge rule has immediate adverse consequence in the context of addressing the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak,” said Attorney General Connors. “It discourages individuals from seeking medical care they are lawfully entitled to receive and thereby hampers the ability of our medical system to identify and control the spread of this disease.”

The letter, directed to the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, blasts the administration for discouraging people, in the midst of a public health crisis, from accessing health care.

“DHS received warnings of the potentially devastating effects of the Rule if its implementation were to coincide with the outbreak of a highly communicable disease – a scenario exactly like the one confronting our communities with the COVID-19 public health emergency,” the letter reads. “Your agency completely failed to consider such legitimate concerns.”

“DHS’s implementation of the Public Charge Rule during this public health crisis is irresponsible and reckless,” the letter continues. “DHS openly concedes the Rule could lead to ‘increased prevalence of communicable diseases,’ disenrollment from public programs, and increased use of emergency rooms as a primary method of health care. Washington State has already had ten deaths attributable to COVID-19. The State is doing everything in its power to limit the spread of the disease and prevent additional fatalities. States, cities, and counties are undertaking similarly dramatic efforts to limit the spread of the disease and mitigate its harmful effects. With this threat looming, however, DHS’s policy of deterring immigrants from using the medical benefits to which they are legally entitled directly undermines and frustrates our public health professionals’ efforts, putting our communities and residents at unnecessary risk.”
Read the letter [here](#).

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