



EQUITY & EXCELLENCE FOR ENGLISH LEARNERS

Massachusetts Association of Teachers  
of Speakers of Other Languages

December 7, 2018

The MATSOL Board of Directors strongly opposes the Department of Homeland Security's proposed rule change to "public charge." The proposed policy will make immigrant families afraid to access essential health, nutrition, and shelter programs. By forcing choices no family should have to make, it puts our community at risk.

MATSOL is a professional organization of over 2,000 Massachusetts educators of English learners in PreK-12 public and independent schools, college and university ESOL programs and teacher preparation programs. Our mission is to promote equity and excellence for English Learners, adult and workplace ESOL programs. We are concerned about the negative effect of this rule change on all immigrant families, including the English Learners we work with every day in our classrooms.

We are particularly concerned about the effects on children in our public schools. For learning to take place, children must feel safe and have their basic needs met, including adequate food and healthcare. In Massachusetts, 390,000 children have at least one immigrant parent. The majority of those children are U.S. citizens.<sup>1</sup> Of those children, 88% are in households below 250% of the FPL and would be affected by the new income threshold in the rule change. There is already evidence that widespread fear of being identified as a "public charge" has caused families to avoid participating in health and nutrition assistance programs.<sup>2</sup> This means that thousands of children will lose vital health care and nutrition benefits, which will adversely affect their ability to succeed in school.

In addition, we are concerned about the trauma to our students due to family separations – or the threat of separation – if immigrant parents are detained or deported after being denied an adjustment of status on public charge grounds. Separations from parents or primary caregivers is one of the most potent traumatic stressors a child can experience, and may increase children's risk for developing depression, anxiety, separation-related posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms, or other trauma reactions.<sup>3</sup> Children need a safe and stable family in order to thrive and learn in school.

The rule change will also place additional burdens on our schools and teachers. Public schools have a responsibility to educate and care for all students. If this proposal is implemented, families will suffer, and schools and individual teachers will have to do what they can to close the gap with limited resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Migration Policy Institute. Children in U.S. Immigrant Families

<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/children-immigrant-families?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true>

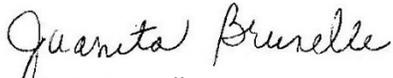
<sup>2</sup> Boston Planning & Development Agency. *Impact of Proposed Federal Immigration Rule Changes on Boston: Public Charge Test for Inadmissibility*. <http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/e856c564-bf0f-47d4-9a44-75b430903f82>

<sup>3</sup> The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. *Key Points: Traumatic Separation and Refugee & Immigrant Children*.

[https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/tip-sheet/key\\_points\\_traumatic\\_separation\\_and\\_refugee\\_immigrant\\_children.pdf](https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/tip-sheet/key_points_traumatic_separation_and_refugee_immigrant_children.pdf)

Our immigrant children have a tremendous potential to make positive contributions to our country as entrepreneurs, scholars, artists and scientists, but their potential will only be realized if we care for them in their early years and ensure that they have the safety and security to focus on their education. No one should have to choose between a chance at a green card, and keeping their family fed, healthy and sheltered. Increasing trauma and stress for students and their families undermines educational mission of our members and hurts our students.

Sincerely,

  
Juanita Brunelle  
President

  
Helen Sciorzano  
Executive Director