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November 29, 2018

Ms. Samantha Deshommes
Chief, Regulatory Coordination Division
Office of Policy and Strategy
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20529-2140

Re: Comments on DHS Docket No. USCIS-2010-0012

Dear Ms. Deshommes:

As the nation's oldest and largest organization representing cities and towns, the National League of Cities (NLC) is committed to helping municipal leaders build better communities. We appreciate the opportunity to submit these comments on the Department of Homeland Security's notice of proposed rulemaking to expand the definition of a "public charge." We believe that the proposed changes would have a direct negative impact on the economic vitality of our communities, both to local businesses and the workforce, and would endanger the health and well-being of our residents. These outcomes are sharply at odds with the work we as city leaders do every day to build thriving communities across the nation. We oppose further expansion of the public charge definition that would preempt cities from offering services to all residents in their communities.

Businesses and service providers in our cities depend on the talent and labor of immigrants, and local economies depend on these businesses. Access to public benefits provides a critical path to economic mobility and security for many residents in our communities, including immigrant families. Further restricting access to these benefits would impede an immigrant's ability to reach their full economic potential, severely limit the ability of farmers and local business to hire workers, and cause long-lasting harm to local economies. Providing access to Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), housing and other public assistance programs to immigrants reduces burdens on safety-net hospitals, eases the strain on local food pantries, and enables farmers, retailers and businesses to hire the workforce they need to improve our economy.

Mayors, councilmembers and other local leaders across the country are active champions of children's well-being, because we understand that investing in

children is the most cost-effective down payment on our future. Research makes clear that access to housing, health care, and nutritious food are essential foundations for a child’s long-term success. Healthy and financially stable children and families are the pillars of financially stable cities. By narrowing access to public benefits that increase health and stable housing, this proposed rule would jeopardize lifelong health and development, earnings, and workforce success of one in four children who have an immigrant parent¹, impacting as many as 26 million people² across our country.

But the proposed rule goes far beyond those non-citizens seeking public benefits, by creating substantial, new, and unnecessary obstacles for all individuals seeking temporary visas and other pathways to citizenship. For example, the requirement that all applicants for temporary visa extensions and changes fill out an entirely new 15-page form (the “I-944”) will impact all businesses that hire immigrants. As local businesses that sponsor visas often pay the legal fees of assembling such documents, the rule constitutes a clear, unfunded mandate on U.S. firms. As our members understand so well, every dollar spent cutting through new federally-mandated red tape, is a dollar not going to investment in training, equipment, or research and development.

We are also disappointed that the proposed rule, which will greatly impact our local economies, is being considered without any consultation with state and local governments. Immigrants deepen the vibrancy and richness of our communities. While accounting for 16 percent of the labor force nationally and 18 percent of business owners, immigrants make up 28 percent of Main Street business owners. “Main Street” businesses are the shops and services that are the backbone of neighborhoods around the country.³ But America’s high-growth entrepreneurial economy—the onramp for many communities to global markets, investment, and jobs—is also dependent on immigrants. Fifty-five percent of American startups currently valued at more than \$1 billion or more, have an immigrant founder. Additionally, we know that the presence of all immigrant workers (legal and illegal) in the labor market makes the U.S. economy (GDP) an estimated 11 percent larger (\$1.6 trillion) each year.⁴

¹ Samantha Artiga and Anthony Damico “Nearly 20 Million Children Live in Immigrant Families that Could Be Affected by Evolving Immigration Policies” Kaiser Family Foundation, 2018

² “Public Charge Proposed Rule: Implications for Non-Citizens and Citizen Family Members Data Dashboard,” Manatt Health, October 2018

³ Source: Americas Society/Council of the Americas and the Fiscal Policy Institute

⁴ Source: Center for Immigration Studies

As leaders who directly interact with residents we serve every day, we can unequivocally say that this proposal would not only weaken our communities but the very fiber of who we are as a nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on this important topic. If you have any questions regarding our responses, I encourage you to reach out to Stephanie Martinez-Ruckman, Program Director for Human Development, at 202-626-3098 or martinez-ruckman@nlc.org.

Sincerely,



Clarence E. Anthony
CEO and Executive Director
National League of Cities



Karen Freeman-Wilson
Mayor, Gary, Indiana
President, National League of Cities