



May 14, 2013

Dear Senator:

I am writing on behalf of the First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC), regarding the ongoing U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee markup of the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act of 2013 (S.744).

FFCC is a nation bipartisan organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. We are committed to ensuring that U.S. immigration policies promote the health and safety of our nation's children and are advocating for passage of immigration reform that duly considers the best interest of children.

We are deeply concerned that proposed amendments to S.744 seek to redefine or alter the application of "public charge". These amendments would add Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to the list of prohibitive benefits. The definition now used by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has been in place since 1999. Based on this definition from the "Field Guidance on Deportability and Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds" 64 FR 28689 (May 26, 1999), unless Medicaid is used to pay for nursing home care or long-term placement in a mental health institution, Medicaid coverage is not subject to public charge consideration.

We oppose any change to the public charge definition that adds such critically important programs to the list of prohibited benefits. Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP help cover children's most basic needs - access to health care and food- which make children healthier students and more productive adults. Medicaid, CHIP, and SNAP serve as work supports to low-income working families, and children and pregnant women are most likely to qualify for them. The healthy development of children, including U.S. citizen children living in immigrant families, could be seriously harmed if immigrant families were deterred from securing these health and nutrition programs.

We strongly urge members of the Senate Judiciary Committee to support children's health and nutrition and protect the definition of public charge as it stands today.

Sincerely,

Bruce Lesley
President