



P.O. BOX 12272  
SEATTLE, WA 98102  
800.722.6924

Website: [northwestharvest.org](http://northwestharvest.org)  
Our Stories: [nwharvest.org](http://nwharvest.org)  
Twitter: [@nwharvest](https://twitter.com/nwharvest)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/NWHarvest](https://facebook.com/NWHarvest)

*Distribution centers: Grays Harbor, King, Spokane and Yakima Counties.*

May 4, 2018

To: The Honorable Jenny Durkan, Mayor of Seattle

Re: Estimated Economic Impact of Proposed Public Charge Rule Change on SNAP and WIC

On behalf of Northwest Harvest, thank you for the opportunity to participate in the upcoming meeting with the Office of Management and Budget to address concerns with a proposed rule change on public charge determination for immigrants. Northwest Harvest is a food justice organization, focused on creating equitable food access in Washington state. Last year, we provided more than 2 million nutritious meals each month through a distribution network of 375 food pantries, meal programs, and high need schools. We also operate our own front-line food pantry, the Cherry Street Food Bank in the First Hill neighborhood. Our food bank is one of the busiest in the state, serving more than 5,000 individuals each week, many of whom are native speakers of Chinese, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Somali languages.

A core value for Northwest Harvest is to provide nutritious food to people in need in a manner that respects their dignity. We intentionally operate a low barrier to service model, providing our food freely to our partners with the only condition that our food be provided to anyone in need, no questions asked. Our sole concern is that no one should go hungry, and this proposed public charge rule goes directly to the heart of this concern: it will discourage our newest neighbors and their U.S. citizen born children from using the basic living support programs for which they are lawfully eligible. This puts all of our communities at risk of seeing deeper hunger, poverty, and crisis if individuals aren't accessing the support programs that help promote economic stability by providing necessities.

Attached to this memo, we present an estimate of the economic impact in the loss of grocery sales and related economic activity from immigrant disenrollment from key nutrition assistance programs—SNAP and WIC—that would be included within the expanded scope of public benefits programs taken into consideration when making a public charge determination. We also wanted to share some anecdotes from our partner network that demonstrates the very real chilling effect that even rumors of these proposed changes have on communities.

We also must address that although leaked drafts of this rule have explicitly exempted evidence of use of private, charitable programs, including food banks, from the public charge determination process, food banks will suffer from this rule change nonetheless. Food banks are already the final safety net for all those who have been left behind in our economy. According to the Washington State Dept. of Agriculture, 1 in 6 Washingtonians rely on

their local food bank. Although the number of total annual visits to food banks has decreased since a recession high, the number of visits for returning customers has increased, suggesting a deeper need for food bank services. We also have seen an increase in food bank customers who are working, often working more than one job. This suggests that there is a deeper need for food bank services in our booming economy because individuals are primarily finding jobs that pay too little to keep up with the high costs of living. Food banks also provide much needed food assistance for households that are no longer eligible for public benefits but still struggle to make ends meet.

The proposed changes to public charge determination will only exacerbate this ongoing difficulty for food banks to meet a deeper need for assistance for those immigrant households who feel safe enough to continue going to their local food bank. This will not be sustainable, especially as we anticipate decreases in individual giving and estate planning gifts, due to recent changes in federal tax law that disincentivize charitable giving. Food banks may end up closing their doors, unable to sustain the costs of meeting this increased need. Communities will suffer even more from the fallout of increased hunger and accompanying health problems that arise from malnutrition.

We plan on addressing these concerns in our remarks but wanted to distill a summary in writing for the record. Thank you for your leadership in requesting this meeting to address these concerns. We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with you in this endeavor.

For additional questions, please contact Christina Wong, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy:  
[christinaw@northwestharvest.org](mailto:christinaw@northwestharvest.org) | 206.923.7465

## Documented Incidents of Chilling Effect on Immigrant Use of Food Banks

- In 2017, the Bellingham Food bank reported that one of their satellite programs saw as much as a 50% decline in their immigrant and Latino client population after (false) rumors of an ICE raid on a food bank spread through their community.
- Emergency Food Network, serving food pantries in Pierce County, have documented that there have been 1,000 fewer Latino clients at Pierce County food banks in 2017
- Earlier this year, during the week after the draft public charge rule was leaked to the press, three immigrant households contacted the University District Food Bank and asked that any history of their use of the food bank be erased.