

November 15, 2018

**Testimony of Health Justice, Immigrant Health Advocate Karina Albistegui Adler
On Behalf of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
Before New York City Council Committees on Immigration, General Welfare, and Health
Regarding the Impact of the Proposed Public Charge Rule on New York City**

My name is Karina Albistegui Adler and I am an Immigrant Health Advocate at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you to Chairpersons Menchaca, Levine, Levin and members of the respective committees for the opportunity to provide testimony on this important matter.

I. We Are New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.

New York Lawyers for the Public Interest has been a leading civil rights and legal services advocate for New Yorkers marginalized by race, poverty, disability, and immigration status for over 40 years. Our Health Justice Program provides health care advocacy in New York City and State through racial justice and immigrant rights lenses. We advocate for better medical treatment for people held in immigration detention centers, language access in healthcare settings, and access to health care for all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status. We invite you to review our report *Detained and Denied: Access to Healthcare in Immigration Detention* for an overview of the human rights crisis in immigration detention facilities in the New York City-area (http://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/HJ-Health-in-Immigration-Detention-Report_2017.pdf).

II. The Proposed Changes to the Public Charge Test Will Exacerbate Health Disparities.

The proposed changes to the Public Charge test are a direct attack on immigrant and

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undocumented New Yorkers, two communities already marginalized because of draconian policies that deny them access to health coverage because of their immigration status. Any changes to the Public Charge test are likely to further make existing negative health disparities among citizen, undocumented and lawfully present New Yorkers across the city worse.

In the months since news outlets began reporting on the leaked versions of the proposed rule, we have seen fear drive our clients, people with serious life-threatening conditions, to make choices that no person should have to make. Many have made the difficult decision of not taking steps to become eligible to enroll in Medicaid, because of the fear that doing so will impact their hope of someday having the opportunity to regularize their immigration status. The aggregate, catastrophic impact of individual decisions cannot be underscored enough. To be clear, our clients are choosing to delay or forgo medical care for life-threatening health conditions for the opportunity to be integrated into the fabric of our society. If this trend continues, the long-term effects on public health, health disparities, and the economy, could be devastating to our city.

III. Recommendations to the City Council.

We hope the City Council will continue the work that has made New York State and New York City national leaders in empowering and protecting immigrant and undocumented communities. We encourage the City Council to support efforts to expand city- and state-funded safety net programs; to promulgate and advocate for health care programs for the benefit of all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status; and to be prepared to quickly restructure programs to shield them from the reach of the Public Charge test.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. We look forward to continuing to work with the Council on this issue and welcome further contact:

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