

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (MCAAP) is writing in fierce opposition to the proposed rule change. We are an organization of 1,600 pediatricians from the state of Massachusetts. As pediatricians-- individuals devoted to the health and wellbeing of children-- we cannot and do not accept the inhumane attack on the core values of our nation that this rule change would represent if enacted, nor can we abide the erosion of our social safety net which is critical to the healthy development of so many children in this country.

In these times of global unrest and growing insecurity of the state of our union and the world, we need expansion of the US's safety net policies. These programs provide vital needs for millions of families in Massachusetts and every state in the nation-- families born and raised here and families new to our land. Medicaid provides impoverished children access preventive medical care and vaccinations, vision and hearing screens, and dental visits --all cost-effective interventions which enable children to grow and thrive. Through Medicaid, those with chronic diseases of childhood—asthma, autism, ADHD, diabetes-- obtain medication so that they can stay healthy and be ready to learn in school. SNAP assures that the 13 million US children who live in a food insecure households will have receive adequate nutrition. Section 8 housing vouchers provide shelter and safety for families with young children to mitigate exposure to violence and danger on the streets. Health, food, education, housing—children are owed these basic human rights, rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

If these proposed changes to the rule are enacted, we pediatricians will be the frontline witnesses to the harm those changes cause. Indeed, we have already seen the harm a leaked draft of the proposed changes caused in 2017. For example, we saw food insecure mothers in our clinics who had not applied for SNAP for fear that it may negatively impact their case for political asylum or US residency status.

Immigrant families face excruciating decisions between accessing public benefits that sustain their children's health or risking family separation if this rule remains on the book. Children's health is not a tool for immigration enforcement. It is the basis of a healthy democracy. From our perspective, the proposed changes are the opposite of what America should be doing. This country was founded on the premise that all persons are created equal. We need to be ensuring that all persons have equal access to basic human rights—food, shelter, education, and health care. We need to be increasing policies and programs that ensure basic human needs are met. To do otherwise threatens the wellbeing of our society, particularly when it comes to children, who represent our future. We need all children in the United States to reach their full potential if we are to reach ours as a nation.

The current administration's continued attacks on immigrant families has sickened and destroyed the health and well-being of untold numbers of children. We cannot stand by and watch our country, the country we love and cherish, further abuse and neglect those most in need of America's hope and strength. We strongly urge the administration to withdraw this harmful proposal.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Goodman, M.D., MBA

President

The Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics