

Evangelical Immigration Table

Council for Christian Colleges
and Universities

Ethics and Religious Liberty
Commission of the Southern
Baptist Convention

Faith and Community
Empowerment

National Association of
Evangelicals

The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

December 10, 2018

On October 10, 2018, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security published a proposed regulation in the [Federal Register](#) that would redefine longstanding understandings of who should be excluded from immigrating lawfully to the U.S. because they are likely to become a “public charge.” As the leadership of the Evangelical Immigration Table, we are troubled by the likelihood that these changes would keep many families apart.

This proposed regulation does not change existing policies that already restrict family-sponsored immigrants from accessing most means-tested public benefits, nor does it amend the existing requirement that a U.S.-based sponsor make a legally-binding commitment to be financially responsible for their immigrant family members.

Instead the proposal gives broad new discretion to governmental employees to deny applications for family reunification and other lawful immigrant visas based on the *suspicion* that an individual might someday apply for public benefits, taking into account considerations such as current income, family size, credit history and education level.

The likely effect of this proposed rule change would be to significantly reduce *legal* immigration to the U.S., particularly among those applying on the basis of marriage or other close family ties. Families with multiple children, single-income households including those in which one parent has chosen to stay at home to care for children and those with children with medical issues or special needs would be particularly disadvantaged under the terms of the proposal. By [one estimate](#), as many as 200,000 married couples annually could be denied immigrant visas, forcing the couple (and in many cases, their children) to either live separately or to live abroad. This is a deeply troubling shift in policy.

Over the past several years, thousands of evangelical pastors and ministry leaders have joined [a call](#) for immigration policy that prioritizes “the unity of the immediate family.” Evangelicals believe that marriage is an institution created by God and that the family is the most foundational building block of society. While Christians may disagree at points on the exact role of government in caring for the poor through public benefit programs, we are unified in our commitment to maintaining the unity of the family whenever possible. Policies that separate or bar the reunification of families are deeply troubling. We believe that all government policy – including immigration policy – should promote the strength and unity of families wherever possible.

In addition, attempts to restrict *legal* immigration, whether by administrative or legislative changes, are likely to incentivize *illegal* immigration.

As such, we are opposed to the proposed rule change. We encourage evangelical Christians throughout the country to [voice their opposition](#) to this proposal as well. And we urge our elected officials at all levels to do what is within their

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authority to ensure that our immigration policies protect the unity of immediate families.

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