Food Assistance Participants Do Not Have to Worry about Public Charge

Applying for or getting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) benefits — also called “food assistance” in Florida — does NOT make an immigrant a public charge, nor does it hurt an immigrant’s chances to become a citizen or get a visa or green card in the future. This should come as good news for Floridians who are nervous about applying for SNAP for themselves or their children because of their immigration status.

What is the public charge test?

“Public charge” means the test used by immigration officials to decide whether a person who wants to become a citizen or get a visa or green card can support themselves. It looks at things like health, income, age, family size, education, job, and sponsor affidavit of support. In some cases, getting assistance from benefit programs may affect that determination.

Do SNAP participants have to worry about public charge?

SNAP is not one of the benefit programs that can hurt immigration status. Immigrants can apply for SNAP without worrying about public charge or its impact on their immigration status or future immigration applications.

How many non-citizens get SNAP in Florida?

Not all immigrants qualify for SNAP. Of the 180,000 immigrants in Florida who have applied for and are getting SNAP, 65 percent are children and seniors.
What about citizen children in families where their parents are ineligible for SNAP?

Some ineligible immigrants have children in their household who are eligible for SNAP. People who are ineligible for SNAP because of their immigration status can apply for SNAP for just their children. The fact that their child gets SNAP will not hurt their own immigration status. If a parent is not applying for themselves, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is not supposed to tell immigration officials about them or ask for their immigration documents or social security number.

What benefit programs affect immigration status?

The benefit programs that immigration officials look at in making public charge determinations include programs that provide cash, like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI), as well long-term institutional care from either Medicaid or another government program. Immigrants thinking about applying for these benefits should speak to an immigration lawyer first.

Fear over immigration status should not keep Floridians who need help from participating in SNAP. Log on to DCF’s website at https://www.myflorida.com/accessflorida/ to apply over the internet, call DCF at 850-300-4323 to get an application mailed to you, or find a community partner to help you apply at https://access-web.dcf.state.fl.us/CPSLookup/search.aspx

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