

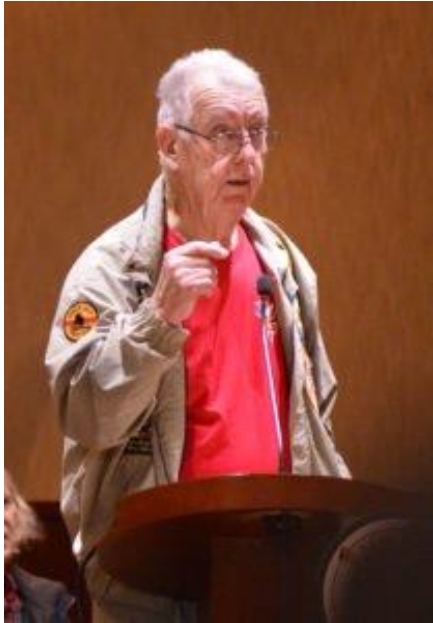


Supervisor Erin Hannigan discusses a possible change in the public charge rule as it relates to immigration during a Board of Supervisors meeting, Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2018. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

Supervisors view proposed 'immigration rule' change as destructive in Solano

By **Todd R. Hansen**

FAIRFIELD — A united Solano County Board of Supervisors will send a letter to Homeland Security outlining how a proposed change to the public charge rule will cost the county financially and take a human toll as well.



Dennis Allen speaks during the public comments section of a Board of Supervisors meeting discussing a possible change in the public charge rule as it relates to immigration, Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2018. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

Supervisor Erin Hannigan, in her motion in support of the letter, also wants the county to initiate an education effort of its own eligibility employees so they fully understand the issue and to develop community outreach programs to educate the public.

“What we don’t want is a mass exodus out of our medical clinics and food bank,” Hannigan said.

The current rule is a standard used by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services as a factor in determining who will be granted entry into the United States, who can renew certain temporary visas and who can obtain lawful permanent residency – also known as a green card.

“Currently, financial factors taken into consideration only includes the receipt of cash benefits or institutionalization for long-term care at government expense,” a staff report states.

The proposed change would also allow officials to consider nutrition assistance, housing subsidies or health care programs such as Medicaid – Medi-Cal in California – in public charge assessments. The county’s concern is that lawful immigrants will stop seeking assistance, including medical care for children, out of fear their immigration status could be negatively affected.

“Many families not subject to a public charge determination may nevertheless choose to forgo benefits for which they qualify, out of fear that their status could otherwise be in jeopardy,” the resolution brought to the board by Supervisor Monica Brown states.

The board adopted the resolution on a 5-0 vote.

“Families avoiding these services could compromise the health, well-being and safety of all Solano County residents and adding additional barriers to accessing programs will drive up poverty among families with children and have lasting consequences on the well-being of immigrant families and the communities in which they live,” the resolution states.



Ravi Shankar speaks during the public comments section of a Board of Supervisors meeting discussing a possible change in the public charge rule as it relates to immigration, Tuesday, Nov. 13, 2018. (Robinson Kuntz/Daily Republic)

Much of the concern is over the confusion “and chilling effect” the proposed rule change is already having on immigrant families who may not even be subject to the rule.

Supervisor Jim Spering said he came to the meeting ready to vote against the resolution, but was convinced to join the majority because the rule could, intended or not, actually harm those who are following the rules when it comes to acquiring a legal immigration status and even possible citizenship.

Officials from various health and community assistance groups, including the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, said they are already seeing people drop off assistance rolls out of fear the proposed rule could damage their immigration status.

Perhaps most disconcerting to the health officials are those who are choosing to drop their enrollment or not enroll at all in medical insurance options – decisions that will actually cost the county more for emergency medical services as well as cause a spike in health issues that could affect the entire community.

Dennis Allen, one of three people who spoke against the resolution, said the fact some people will get confused over a rule change that does not affect them is not a reason to oppose the Homeland Security proposal.

“My concern is something called the rule of law,” Allen said.

People who are in this country illegally should not be getting publicly subsidized benefits, he said.

George Guynn Jr. ratcheted the rhetoric up even higher by calling the resolution “socialist hogwash” and those who do not support President Donald Trump’s guarded border policy as “treasonous.”

The issue raised emotions on both sides, with some opponents to the rule change referring to Trump only as “that White House occupant” and likening those who do not take action against the proposal to those who failed to act against the Holocaust.

Spering called that reference insulting.

The majority of those who spoke at the meeting were opposed to the rule change.

“I think it will affect children most, and many of those children are American citizens,” said Dr. Lorenies Allio, who works in the nonprofit community.

Gerald Huber, director of the county’s Department of Health and Social Services, said he views the proposal as a way for the Trump administration to scale back the Medicaid program to save money.

In the end, though, he said it will drive up the cost of medical services while diminishing the health of the community. He said he was particularly concerned with what could happen in the schools.