The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence opposes the proposed public charge rule changes. The Vermont Network is a federally recognized statewide coalition with 15 member organizations providing direct supports to survivors of domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking.

In order to end domestic and sexual violence, we must work to ensure that our communities can thrive. We know that poverty increases vulnerability to domestic and sexual violence. The proposed public charge rule would affect immigrant survivors’ ability to access health, housing and food assistance. These programs and other supports are key in helping a survivor escape and heal from abuse.

The proposed regulation would be harmful for families and communities. Immigrants who experience domestic or sexual violence would be forced to choose between basic needs assistance and their ability to live free from fear of deportation. This is an untenable choice. This proposed rule change ignores basic human rights and increases vulnerability to violence for the most marginalized in our society.

We oppose including use of the Children’s Health Insurance Program in the negative factors counting against immigrant families. Having access to comprehensive health care coverage is critical for children who have experienced trauma. Pediatricians and other healthcare providers play a vital role in helping children and families build protective factors. These protective factors help promote resiliency and mitigate the effects of trauma. Healthy children mean healthy communities for all of us. Without access to this program immigrant children and their families will lack a crucial resource that they need in to heal and thrive.

The Vermont Network is committed to a world where all people thrive. The proposed public charge changes would weaken the health and safety of our communities; making it more difficult for immigrant survivors to gain economic stability and access to safety. It is a significant and harmful departure from current policy and we strongly oppose it.