



Rep. Torres pens letter to VP ci concerns over 'public charge' i effect on coronavirus outbreak

BY J. EDWARD MORENO - 02/28/20 09:30 AM EST

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Rep. Norma Torres (D-Calif.) penned a letter to Vice President Pence asking him to “reconsider the implementation” of the “public charge” rule in light of the coronavirus outbreak.

The rule, which critics call a “wealth test” for immigrants, was contested in U.S. district courts since it was introduced in August until the [Supreme Court ruled in the administration’s favor last Friday](#). The new provision could deem an immigrant ineligible for permanent status or citizenship if they have a history of using public assistance, such as Medicaid.

On Wednesday, President Trump made a rare appearance in the White House briefing room, where he announced that Pence would lead the coronavirus task force and sought to mitigate assertions from Democrats claiming the response from the administration was inadequate thus far.

Torres delivered the letter to acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney and acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf during an unclassified, bipartisan all-member congressional briefing on the coronavirus Friday morning.

Torres said immigrants who hesitate to use government-issued disease prevention resources pose a risk not only to themselves, but those around them.

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"The 'public charge' rule is a deterrent for symptomatic individuals to seek medical testing and treatment," Torres wrote. "Individuals infected with coronavirus who are left untested and untreated will be contagious agents of the disease in our communities, potentially furthering the spread of coronavirus in the United States."

As of Wednesday night, over 80,000 cases of the coronavirus have been confirmed worldwide, of which 60 are in the U.S.

Torres's letter comes as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has warned of the implications surrounding the proliferation of the coronavirus in the U.S.

"It's not a question of if this will happen but when this will happen and how many people in this country will have severe illnesses," said Nancy Messonnier, the director of the CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. "Disruption to everyday life might be severe."

At the Wednesday conference, however, Trump repeatedly said he did not think it was "inevitable."

CDC officials have said a vaccine for the virus could be available late this year, if not in 2021. Torres said when immigrants are afraid to take any resources from the federal government, including potential viral vaccines, it poses a "public health threat."

"The 'public charge' rule will undoubtedly cause individuals across the country to also avoid seeking testing and treatment of the coronavirus," Torres wrote. "With individuals foregoing health care out of fear of the 'public charge' rule on their future, our country risks furthering the spread of coronavirus within our communities."

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