Will Using Benefits Hurt My Chances of Getting a Green Card or Becoming a U.S. Citizen?

If you do not have a green card yet:

😊 NO PROBLEM. You will not hurt your chances of getting a green card if you use:

- HEALTH CARE, such as State Medical Assistance, Basic Health Plan, Children’s Health Program, WIC, prenatal care or other free or low-cost medical care
- FOOD PROGRAMS, such as Food Stamps, Food Assistance Program (FAP), WIC, school meals, and other food assistance
- NON-CASH PROGRAMS, like public housing, disaster relief, child care services, job training and transportation vouchers

😊 MIGHT BE A PROBLEM. You will have a problem getting your green card if YOU use:

- CASH WELFARE, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), State Family Assistance (SFA), Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or ABD (Aged Blind and Disabled) cash assistance
- LONG-TERM CARE in a nursing home or other facility paid for by State Medical Assistance or other governmental funds

CASH WELFARE for your children or other family members is okay if it is not your family’s only source of support.

If you are a refugee or asylee:

😊 NO PROBLEM. You can use ANY benefits, including cash welfare, health care, food programs, and non-cash programs, without hurting your chances of getting a green card.

If you are a victim of abuse (granted VAWA relief) or of a crime (granted U or T visa):

😊 NO PROBLEM. You can use ANY benefits, including cash welfare, health care, food programs, and non-cash programs, without hurting your chances of getting a green card.

If you already have a green card:

😊 NO PROBLEM. You cannot lose your green card if you use or your family uses:

- HEALTH CARE, FOOD PROGRAMS, and other NON-CASH PROGRAMS
• CASH WELFARE
• LONG-TERM CARE

😊 MIGHT BE A PROBLEM. You may have a problem if:

• You leave the U.S. for more than six months in a row AND you have used cash welfare or long-term care, or

• In extremely rare cases, you use cash welfare or long-term care during your first five years in the U.S., for reasons (such as illness or disability) that existed BEFORE you entered the U.S.

If you are applying for U.S. citizenship:

😊 NO PROBLEM. You cannot be denied U.S. citizenship for lawfully receiving benefits, including cash welfare, health care, food programs, and non-cash programs.

If you want to sponsor a relative:

😊 NO PROBLEM. Using benefits, including cash welfare, health care, food programs, and non-cash programs, should not prevent you from sponsoring your relative. You will need to show that you or your co-sponsor earns enough income to support your relative.

For more information, call Coordinated Legal Education Advice & Referral (CLEAR) at 1-888-201-1014

Adapted from “Will Using Benefits Hurt My Chances of Getting a Green Card or Becoming a U.S. Citizen?” developed by the Asian Pacific American Legal Center for the California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative.

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