

US citizens married to undocumented immigrants denied stimulus checks

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US citizens married to undocumented immigrants have been denied stimulus checks that they would otherwise be entitled to under the CARES package. A provision tucked into the \$2.3 trillion stimulus package, passed last month by Congress, prohibits stimulus checks from being sent to couples if one of them has used an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) in jointly filed tax returns. This does not apply if either spouse served in the military during the previous tax year.

The IRS states that a TIN is solely for tax purposes and will not be treated as a measure of legal status. However, this form of identification is commonly used by immigrants, who might not have a Social Security number. Not surprisingly, this has been used by the Trump administration as yet another opportunity to escalate its war on immigrants.

The cruelty and punitive character of this measure cannot be over emphasized. An estimated 1.2 million Americans are married to undocumented immigrants, and at the time of posting, over 30 million Americans have become unemployed within a short span of one month. The CARES package provides stimulus checks of \$2,400 to families with an income of up to \$150,000, with an additional \$500 for each child under the age of 16. The eligibility and amount are supposed to be determined on the basis of tax returns for 2018, or 2019, if the latter has already been filed.

The package has been presented by both parties as providing much needed support to the working class during an emergency. However, as the anti-immigrant provisions make clear, that is not the case. Millions of tax-paying immigrants were already excluded from the relief measures because of their undocumented status. But this provision blocks even American citizens from receiving stimulus checks. A measure putatively meant

to help Americans reeling from the economic fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, in fact, penalizes families for the crime of having a single undocumented immigrant as a tax-paying member.

As the *New York Times* reported last week, working class families have had to take drastic measures, including skipping meals and taking on potentially dangerous part-time work, as they struggle to make ends meet in the current climate. Luz María Ortíz de Pulido, an immigrant from Mexico, worked as a house cleaner in Del Valle, Texas. With the pandemic, her work has almost completely dried up, leaving the family—including four children and one grandchild living with them—completely dependent on the earnings of her husband, Valentine Pulido, an American citizen born in California. Even in the best of times the family barely got by, with Ms. Pulido knowing “never to splurge on unnecessary indulgences like yogurt, or anything but the cheapest off-brand cereals.” The stimulus should have entitled the family to \$2,700—\$1,200 for Mr. Pulido and \$500 each for each dependent child. But because the couple filed their taxes jointly, the family has been deprived of even a penny of the much-needed assistance.

The irony of the situation is hard to miss. Only families with undocumented immigrants, who actually pay federal income and Social Security taxes, are being targeted by this punitive exclusion. The fact that American citizens married to immigrants who do not report their income are still eligible to receive the stimulus checks only serves to underscore the callousness of such a provision. To add insult to injury, many of those denied stimulus checks are front-line workers carrying out essential tasks in hospitals, food stores and public transit.

Speaking to the *Los Angeles Times*, Randall Emery,

president of American Families United, a nonprofit that advocates for US citizens married to immigrants, said: “It’s just fundamentally unfair, and it’s really, really targeted to hurt. ... It’s such a basic thing that the government would protect its own citizens and the government is really abandoning US citizens when they need help the most. A lot of people really need this just to survive.”

A few weeks ago, “United We Dream,” an immigrant advocacy group, created a fund to help families across the nation. Bruna Sollod, the communications director for the group, told the *New York Times* that within 10 minutes of making the application available online, the group received over 1,300 requests for help from families across 30 states. However, since the group’s funds could be stretched only to provide \$400 support to about 300 families, they had to take down the application almost immediately.

The sheer extent of the crisis facing working class families is yet to be fully documented. But at a time when unemployment is soaring to levels not seen since the 1930s, when long lines outside food banks are becoming part of a dreary daily landscape, and even the IMF predicts a new “Great Depression,” denying the most vulnerable sections of society a paltry one-time relief is nothing short of criminal. The rapacious character of the ruling class is particularly evident given provisions in the stimulus package that provides “relief” to millionaires, billionaires and “needy” banks and corporations.

In the past week, two federal lawsuits filed in Illinois and New York have challenged the immigrant exclusion provision on the grounds that denying the funds to US citizens because their spouses lack Social Security numbers violates the constitutional rights to free association, due process and equal protection under the law. Whatever the fate of these lawsuits, what should be clear by now is that the Trump administration is going to ratchet up its xenophobic, anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies in the coming months.



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