



[Coalition of Civil Rights Groups Sue the State Department Over a Pause on Visa Processing for Citizens from 75 Countries](#)

In recent weeks, the Trump administration announced a new immigration policy that places an indefinite pause on visa processing for nationals from 75 countries. The move, which applies primarily to employment-based and family-based immigration, has prompted immediate legal challenges from a coalition of civil rights groups and immigration advocates who argue that the policy represents a sharp departure from longstanding U.S. immigration practices. The ban itself has been framed by the current administration as a measure to prevent future dependence on public assistance, but legal experts have outlined that it is complicated just how far the federal government can go in restricting entry based on factors such as economic risk and national origin.

This new ban – which went into effect on January 21st – is part of a collection of efforts to tighten U.S. entry standards for foreign nationals. Previous bans have restricted entry based on security and vetting concerns, but this latest policy has indefinitely paused the issuance of visas for nationals from 75 different countries. A handful of non-profits and legal organizations claim that the new ban affects employment and family-based visas, seemingly not impacting student or tourist visas. The basis for the Trump administration to halt applications is to limit the number of individuals who are likely to become a “public charge,” which under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), is defined as an immigrant who is expected to depend on government assistance like Medicaid or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The INA was enacted in 1952 and has since been amended over the years, though it does not include the United States government’s definition of public charge. In fact, the factors used to determine whether an applicant is likely to become dependent on the government is based on considerations such as age, health, family status, assets, resources, and education. In addition to these factors, the Trump administration now wants to determine eligibility based on nationality, geography, and English-proficiency as well. The lawsuit addresses this fact accordingly stating that “the law has never deemed a person inadmissible merely because they may one day need public benefits.” Some have also pointed out that immigrants are usually only eligible for cash welfare after they have obtained their green card for at least five years. Thus, they do not receive benefits right away, unless they are victims of human trafficking, asylum seekers, or refugees, in which cases, they may be eligible for assistance sooner.

Furthermore, the coalition of organizations filing the lawsuit raise concerns over issues like the blanket bans' indefinite timeline, the lack of explanation for abandoning the original case-by-case framework, and conflict with the INA's prohibition on nationality-level discrimination in the issuance of immigrant visas. Around 85% of the populations impacted are non-European, and therefore a significant level of unease exists about the ban's disproportionate effect on people from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. Those who oppose the ban also fear it creates a space for generalized assumptions about immigrant groups, turning nationality into a determining factor for admissibility into the United States.

On the other hand, supporters of the policy argue that the administration is acting within its authority to regulate immigration in a way that prioritizes economic self-sufficiency and reduces strain on public resources. They say that the public charge framework has long been part of U.S. immigration law and that updating how risk is assessed is a reasonable response to current economic pressures – including rising healthcare costs and limited social service capacity at both the state and federal levels. From this perspective, expanding the criteria used in visa decisions is not seen as discrimination, but instead as an effort to modernize screening standards.

Administration officials and policymakers have also noted that nationality and geography are already factored into immigration decisions in indirect ways, such as through country-specific caps, security assessments, and regional instability evaluations. They argue that formalizing these considerations provides consistency, rather than leaving decisions solely to discretionary judgment. Some proponents also state that evaluating English proficiency and education levels is intended to measure an applicant's ability to integrate into the workforce and avoid long-term economic hardship, not to exclude individuals based on identity or origin.

Others defending the ban point to past instances where similar sized large-scale migration coincided with under-resourced public systems, putting forth the contention that preventive restrictions are preferable to reactive measures in the future. They frame the policy as temporary and adjustable, seeking to assure that the administration will still retain the ability to revise or lift restrictions as conditions change. Those in this camp try to therefore label the pause on visa issuance as a tool for reassessment as opposed to any form of permanent exclusion.

Still, even among those who accept the administration's stated goals, there is debate over whether such a sweeping, nationality-based approach is the most effective or lawful means of achieving them. Legal critics worry that these general bans risk undermining the individualized assessment model that has historically guided U.S. immigration decisions. Thus, the ongoing legal challenge will ultimately test how far executive authority can extend in redefining admissibility standards, especially regarding protections against discrimination. As the case moves forward, the outcome may shape not only the future of this policy, but the direction of U.S. immigration law as well.