

January 28, 2020

Statement from New Jersey Secretary of Higher Education Zakiya Smith Ellis

“Yesterday, the Supreme Court made the lives of immigrant college students in New Jersey harder. The Court ruled that a federal policy barring immigrants from citizenship who accept public benefits can take effect while the legal challenges to that rule continue. Implementation of the “Public Charge” rule is unwise and potentially hurtful to many of our students. Instead of enrolling in SNAP and receiving food benefits that enable them to focus on learning skills and earning good grades, they will have to refuse these benefits – even if it means going hungry. They may also mistakenly refuse other benefits not covered by the Public Charge rule, such as Pell Grants. At a time when more careers require a postsecondary credential, the Public Charge rule could lead many immigrants to lose access to higher education altogether or lose access to key wraparound services that would help them progress to obtaining a credential. Every student in New Jersey should feel safe and supported. This policy sends the opposite message. As a State, we will continue to work towards building communities - particularly within New Jersey’s colleges and universities - that respect and support people from *all* backgrounds.”