Starting February 24, 2020 the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will begin to examine immigration applications for extension of stay or change of status to see if the applicant has become a “public charge.” This rule has existed for over a hundred years, but mainly for immigrants (permanent residents) coming to the U.S. The change is that F, J, H and O applicants will now be subject to the rule.

The term “public charge” means accepting certain U.S. taxpayer funded public benefits such as housing or food assistance for low-income households. The state of Connecticut offers assistance programs, but “non-immigrants” (individuals who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents) may be penalized if they accept them.

This is a very complicated regulation, but there are a few resources and we will add more as they become available. Please review the Connecticut Department of Social Services resources [1] explaining different benefits, as well as the USCIS page [2] on how accepting benefits may impact your visa status.