

Protect the Dreamers & Immigrants Families



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The National Blueprint for Excellence in Child Welfare encourages communities and other entities to proactively seek to identify and remove systematic barriers to participation by immigrant children, youth, and families. These communities should ensure that appropriate supports and services are available without regard to visa status or citizenship.

In past Congresses, there have been several bipartisan “Dreamers Acts,” including the *DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act of 2017*. This legislation would grant DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) beneficiaries permanent resident status on a conditional basis. Conditions include passing a background check and medical exam, entering the United States before the age of 18, and having been continuously present in the United States since at least four years before enactment. Dreamers must also meet educational requirements, including having been admitted to a college, university, or other institution of higher learning; having earned a high school diploma or general education development (GED) certificate; or currently being enrolled in a secondary education program to obtain a high school diploma or GED certificate. Dreamers cannot have been convicted of criminal offenses. Congress needs to protect DACA-status immigrants by passing the DREAM Act.

Almost nine million young children under the age of 8 live in a family of immigrants with one or more members who are foreign-born. Young children in these families, a growing segment of children in the United States, comprise 26% of all children under age 8.¹ Roughly half a million U.S.-citizen children experienced the apprehension, detention, and deportation of at least one parent between 2011 and 2013. If a parent is unable to arrange child care or custody prior to detention or deportation, the child may be taken by the state’s Child Protective Services (CPS) agency for placement and case management. The child is usually placed in an emergency shelter, group home, or with a relative, friend, or stranger in a foster home while custody is determined in family court.²

When children are separated from parents, they face short- and long-term psychological damage, including depression, post-traumatic stress, anxiety, feelings of abandonment, and suicidal thoughts. Being separated from their family members and their communities, cultural familiarities, and schools and other connections can cause children to struggle with their identity and face an undue sense of isolation, adding further stress to an already traumatic situation. We call on Congress to enact fair immigration reform, to suspend mass deportations, and oppose

¹ Cervantes, W., Ullrich, R., & Matthews, H. *Stop Separating Families*, Fact Sheet. Washington DC: CLASP.

² Ibid.

policies that seek to deter immigration by separating children from their parents. Congress and the Administration must ensure that the best interests of children, including U.S.-citizen children living in mixed-status families, are held paramount in immigration policy decisions.

We are learning that the recent enforcement action is taking its toll on children. Children as young as three are aware of recent anti-immigrant actions by the government. These young children's daily routines are interrupted because fear is keeping families isolated in their homes. Parent and provider accounts suggest that young children are getting less access to nutrition and health care services because of families' fears.³

Children from many of these families are at increased risk of separation in times of raids, bans, and other immigration restrictions. Currently, there is no consistent mechanism across child welfare systems to adequately identify immigrant status, which has contributed to a lack of understanding of this population and their unique needs. The inability of the child welfare and immigration systems to work together results in abrupt separation of parents and children after parents are detained or deported and can lead to long stays in foster care for children and youth.

Family unity is recognized as a fundamental human right, enshrined in international law. Moreover, separating children from their parents is cruel, traumatizing all those involved. The American Academy of Pediatrics, in a recent statement, expressed serious concern over the proposal to separate migrant parents from their children, calling the plan "harsh and counterproductive" and stating that authorities should "exercise caution to ensure that the emotional and physical stress children experience as they seek refuge in the United States is not exacerbated by the additional trauma of being separated from their siblings, parents or other relatives and caregivers." It is estimated that over 5,000 children are currently living in foster care because their parents have been detained or deported on the basis of being undocumented⁴.

In addition, new policies could be implemented that may restrict access to human services that target some of these families including documented immigrants. Such actions will only increase stress on the families and the children.

Unaccompanied immigrant children are a particularly vulnerable segment of the child population as they are increasingly susceptible to hardship and become targets for trafficking. To threaten families who are fleeing harm and legally seeking protection at our borders with family separation in order to deter their migration is cruel and unjust.

Congress needs to pass comprehensive immigration reform. This is the only solution to many of the challenges we are debating in 2018, including protecting children caught up in federal raids, unaccompanied minors, Dreamers, and families that seek a better opportunity in a 21st century United States. This includes rejecting any policy that separates children from parents as an immigration enforcement tool. This is unacceptable.

³ Cervantes, W., Ullrich, R., & Mathews, H., *Our Children's Fear: Immigration Policy's Effects on Young Children*, CLASP, March 2018

⁴ Wessler, S., *Shattered Families: the Perilous intersection of immigration enforcement and the Child Welfare System*, Applied Research Center (ARC), November, 2011, taken from the Website, March 17, 2017: file:///C:/Users/NYMet/Downloads/ARC_Report_Shattered_Families_FULL_REPORT_Nov2011Release.pdf