June 7, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20016

Renewed Appeal from Experts in Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice and Child Development to Halt the Separation of Children from Parents at the Border

Dear Secretary Nielsen:

We represent 540 organizations from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico that have well-recognized expertise in the fields of child welfare, juvenile justice and child health, development and safety. We first sent this letter to you on January 16, 2018 and resubmitted the letter on January 23, 2018 to include additional organizations. Since then, DHS implemented a systematic practice of separating children from their parents—as many as 658 children in just two weeks in May 2018—and our ranks grew by more than 300 organizations.

We write again today, after the formal implementation of practices to separate immigrant families, to renew our shared concern that your agency is harming children by taking them from their parents to deter or punish parents and children who come to our border seeking protection. The separation of children from their parents to deter migration, or to punish migration, will have significant and long-lasting consequences for the safety, health, development, and well-being of children. We therefore urgently request that the Administration reverse course on its practice of separating families at the border.

Countless reports have documented that these families are fleeing persecution and violence in their countries, and come here seeking protection. While many come from Central American countries, the parents and children arrive at our border from all over the world, including countries in Africa, the Caribbean, South America, Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

Since early May, DHS in collaboration with the Department of Justice has routinely separated immigrant children from their parents and families. Parents may be placed in adult immigration detention centers and/or summarily deported, while their children are transferred to the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in facilities across the country—as far away as Illinois, Washington, New York, Florida, and Michigan. HHS bears the responsibility of caring for the traumatized children and finding suitable, alternative caregivers.

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The children could remain in government care for months or more than a year, during which time the continued separation from their parents would compound their trauma and the time it would take them to recover and return to a trajectory of good health and normal development. Nor does it make any sense to require the children to participate in a formal legal proceeding about their immigration case while separated from the parent who brought them here, who may have critical information—or the only information—about the child’s claim for protection.

There is overwhelming evidence that children need to be cared for by their parents to be safe and healthy, to grow and develop. Likewise, there is ample evidence that separating children from their mothers or fathers leads to serious, negative consequences to children’s health and development. Forced separation disrupts the parent-child relationship and puts children at increased risk for both physical and mental illness. Adverse childhood experiences—including the incarceration of a family member—are well-recognized precursors of negative health outcomes later in life. And the psychological distress, anxiety, and depression associated with separation from a parent would follow the children well after the immediate period of separation—even after eventual reunification with a parent or other family. We are deeply concerned that recent agency actions institutionalize such harm by taking children from their parents as a matter of policy.

Family unity is a foundational principle of child welfare law. In order to grow and develop, children need to remain in the care of their parents where they are loved, nurtured and feel safe. Thus parents’ rights to the care and custody of their children are afforded particularly strong protection under the U.S. Constitution. While parent-child relationships are generally the province of state law, federal law also recognizes the principle of family unity by providing strong incentives for states to keep children with their parents and to provide services to families to prevent separation and maintain family unity. The administration’s current policies and practices eviscerate that principle.

5 See, e.g., Santosky v. Kramer, 455 U.S. 745, 753 (1982) (a parent’s right to the care and custody of her child is a fundamental liberty interest).
6 See U.S. Dep’t of Health and Human Services, Children’s Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway, Reasonable Efforts to Preserve or Reunify Families and Achieve Permanency for Children, (March 2016), available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/reunify.pdf (“Federal law has long required State agencies to demonstrate that reasonable efforts have been made to provide assistance and services to prevent the removal of a child from his or her home.”).
For all of these reasons, we urge you to abandon current policies and practices that systematically separate children from their families absent evidence that a specific parent posed a threat to the safety and well-being of his or her child, as required by the laws of all 50 states. Should you have any questions about the serious concerns raised in this letter, or wish to respond to us directly, please contact MaryLee Allen, Director of Policy, Children’s Defense Fund at mallen@childrensdefense.org.

Sincerely,

National Organizations
Adopt America Network
Adoption Exchange Association
Alliance for Early Success
Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Physicians
American Pediatric Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychological Association
Association of Children’s Residential Centers
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Boys Town
BUILD Initiative
Campaign for Youth Justice
Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities
Center for Children’s Law and Policy
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University
Child Care Aware of America
Child First, Inc.
Child Welfare League of America
Children and Family Futures
Children’s Advocacy Institute
Children’s Defense Fund
Children’s Law Center
Children’s Home Society of America
Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Community Catalyst
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund
Dorothy Day Catholic Worker
Every Child Matters
Every Mother is a Working Mother Network
Family Focused Treatment Association
Ray E. Helfer Society
RISE
Robert F Kennedy Children’s Action Corps
School Social Work Association of America
SchoolHouse Connection (SHC)
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Society for Pediatric Research (SPR)
The Children’s Village
The Sentencing Project
UNICEF USA
Voice for Adoption
W. Haywood Burns Institute
Within Our Reach
Year Up
Youth Advocate Programs (YAP)
Youth Catalytics
Youth Law Center
ZERO TO THREE

State and Local Organizations

**Alabama**
- Alabama Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
- Alabama Institute for Social Justice
- First 5 Alabama
- VOICES for Alabama Children

**Alaska**
- Alaska Children's Trust
- Northern and Interior Alaska Association for the Education of Young Children (NIAAEYC)
- Northwest Resource Associates
- Presbyterian Hospitality House

**Arizona**
- A New Leaf
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Arizona Chapter
- Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children (AzAEYC)
- Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence
- Arizona Council of Human Service Providers

**(Arizona continued)**
- Arizona Legal Women and Youth Services (ALWAYS)
- Child and Family Resources
- Children’s Action Alliance
- Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Arizona Chapter
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence – Phoenix
- Prevent Child Abuse Arizona
- Southern Arizona Association for the Education of Young Children (SAZAEYC)
- Southwest Key Programs

**Arkansas**
- Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families (AACF)
- Arkansas Association for Infant Mental Health (AAIMH)
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Arkansas Chapter
California
- American Academy of Pediatrics – California Chapter
- California Association for the Education of Young Children (CAAEYC)
- California Child Care Resource & Referral Network
- California Department of Social Services
- Casa Pacifica Centers for Children & Families
- Children Now
- Children’s Defense Fund – California (CDF-CA)
- Children’s Law Center of California
- Consortium for Children
- County Welfare Directors Association of California
- Family Violence Appellate Project
- Family Voices of California
- First 5 Association of California
- First 5 LA
- Harriet Buhai Center for Family Law
- Hillside
- Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity
- Kids in Common, a program of Planned Parenthood Mar Monte
- Legal Services for Children
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – San Francisco Bay Area Chapter
- OneJustice
- Parent Voices
- San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program
- Southwest Key Programs
- Sunny Hills Services
- The Children’s Partnership
- The Law Foundation of Silicon Valley
- University of California, Berkeley Center for the Study of Child Care Employment
- VOICES Youth Centers
- Wayfinder Family Services
- Youth Justice Coalition

Colorado
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Colorado Chapter
- Clayton Early Learning
- Colorado Association for Infant Mental Health (COAIMH)
- Colorado Children’s Campaign
- Colorado Office of the Alternate Defense Counsel
- Colorado Office of the Child’s Representative
- Colorado Juvenile Defender Center (CJDC)
- Rocky Mountain Children’s Law Center
- The Adoption Exchange

Connecticut
- All Our Kin
- Center for Children’s Advocacy, Inc.
- Children in Placement – CT, Inc.
- Connecticut Alliance of Foster and Adoptive Families, Inc
- Connecticut Association for Human Services
- Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
- Connecticut Voices for Children
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Connecticut Chapter
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Connecticut Chapter

Delaware
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Delaware Chapter
- Girls Incorporated of Delaware
Florida
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Florida Chapter
- Florida Health Justice Project
- Florida Policy Institute
- Florida’s Children First
- Heartland for Children
- Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County, Inc.
- One Hope United
- Sant La Haitian Neighborhood Center
- Southwest Key Programs
- University of Miami School of Law Children and Youth Law Clinic

Georgia
- CHRIS 180
- Families First
- Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEARS)
- Quality Care for Children
- Voices for Georgia's Children

Hawaii
- EPIC ‘Ohana
- Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children (HIAEYC)
- Hawaii Children’s Action Network (HCAN)

Idaho
- Idaho Association for Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health (AIM Early Idaho)
- Idaho Parents Unlimited, Inc.

Illinois (continued)
- Center on Halsted
- Chicago Children's Advocacy Center
- Chicago Survivors
- Children’s Place Association
- Community Behavioral Healthcare Association of Illinois
- Community Crisis Center, Inc.
- Connections for Abused Women and their Children (CAWC)
- Duane Dean Behavioral Health Services
- East Side Aligned
- Elgin Partnership of Early Learning
- Erickson Institute
- Erie Neighborhood House
- Esperanza Health Centers
- EverThrive Illinois
- Family Focus
- Forefront
- Foster Care Alumni of America-Illinois Chapter
- Heartland Human Care Services
- HOPE of Ogle County
- Hoyleton Youth & Family Services
- Illinois Action for Children
- Illinois AfterSchool Network
- Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health (ILAIMH)
- Illinois Association for the Education of Young Children (Illinois AEYC)
- Illinois Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ILAECTE)
- Illinois Association of Rehabilitation Facilities
- Illinois Childhood Trauma Coalition
- Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Illinois Collaboration on Youth
- Illinois Head Start
- Illinois Partners for Human Service
- Illinois PTA
- Illinois Public Health Association
- Illinois Public Health Institute
- Instituto del Progreso Latino
- Jewish Child and Family Services
- Juvenile Justice Initiative of Illinois
(Illinois continued)
- Juvenile Protective Association
- Kaleidoscope
- Legal Council for Health Justice
- Leslie Bates Davis Neighborhood House, Inc.
- Loyola University Chicago Civitas Childlaw Center
- Mano a Mano Family Resource Center
- Maryville Academy
- Metropolitan Family Services
- Mid Central Community Action, Inc.
- National Alliance on Mental Illness Chicago (NAMI Chicago)
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Illinois Chapter
- One Hope United
- Ounce of Prevention Fund
- Puentes de Esperanza
- Rincon Family Services
- Safe Passage
- Starfish Family Homes
- Stopping Woman Abuse Now (SWAN)
- The Baby Fold
- Thresholds
- Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities
- Voices for Illinois Children
- Youth Employment Coalition
- YMCA Sauk Valley
- YWCA of Elgin

Indiana
- Family Voices Indiana
- Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children (Indiana AEYC)
- Indiana Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children
- Marion County Commission on Youth, Inc.
- The Villages of Indiana, Inc.

Iowa
- Bethany for Children & Families
- Child and Family Policy Center
- Iowa Association for the Education of Young Children (Iowa AEYC)
- Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence (ICADV)
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Iowa Chapter
- YSS

Kansas
- Alliance for Childhood Education
- Children’s Alliance of Kansas
- El Centro
- Foster Adopt Connect
- Kansas Action for Children
- Kansas Appleseed
- Kansas Association for the Education of Young Children
- Kansas Head Start Association
- Saint Francis Community Services
- United Community Services of Johnson County

Kentucky
- Juvenile Restorative Justice, Inc.
- Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Kentucky Chapter
- Omni Visions

Louisiana
- Agenda for Children
- American Academy of Pediatrics - Louisiana Chapter
- Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children
- Kingsley House
- Louisiana Policy Institute for Children
Maine
- American Academy of Pediatrics - Maine Chapter
- Community Concepts, Inc.
- Helping Hands with Heart
- Maine Association of Psychiatric Physicians
- Maine Children’s Alliance
- Maine Community Action Association
- Maine Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists
- Maine Resilience Building Network (MRBN)
- Tri-County Mental Health Services

Maryland
- Advocates for Children and Youth
- Identity, Inc.
- Maryland Family Network
- Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Massachusetts
- Association for Behavioral Health Care
- Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts
- Children’s Mental Health Campaign
- Citizens for Juvenile Justice
- Committee for Public Counsel Services
- Communities for People (CFP)
- Health Law Advocates
- Lower Roxbury Coalition
- Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange
- Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children (MassAEYC)
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI)
- Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Massachusetts Chapter
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Massachusetts Chapter
- Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL)

Massachusetts
- Strategies for Children (SFC)
- The Children’s League of Massachusetts
- Whittier Street Health Center

Michigan
- Heartland Human Care Services
- Methodist Children's Home Society
- Michigan DEC
- Michigan’s Children
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Michigan Chapter

Minnesota
- AspireMN
- Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota
- Children’s Law Center of Minnesota
- Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children & MN School-Age Care Alliance
- Minnesota CEC/DEC
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Minnesota Chapter
- North Homes Children and Family Services

Mississippi
- American Academy of Pediatrics - Mississippi Chapter
- Mississippi Coalition Against Domestic Violence (MCADV)
- Mississippi Low Income Child Care Initiative

Missouri
- Alliance for Childhood Education
- American Academy of Pediatrics - Missouri Chapter
- Foster Adopt Connect
- One Hope United

Montana
- Child Care Resources
Nebraska
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Midwest Chapter (Nebraska)
- PromiseShip
- Saint Francis Community Services
- Voices for Children in Nebraska

Nevada
- ACTIONN
- Children’s Advocacy Alliance
- Community Chest, Inc
- Family to Family Connection, ISD 13
- Foster Change
- Foster Kinship
- Hispanic Caucus
- Make it Work Nevada
- Make the Road Nevada
- Nevada Coalition to End Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN)
- The Foster and Adoption Coalition of Nevada
- The Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Southern Nevada
- The Adoption Exchange
- The Hills Preschool

New Hampshire
- American Academy of Pediatrics - New Hampshire Chapter
- Girls Incorporated of New Hampshire
- New Hampshire Association for the Education of Young Children (NHAEYC)

New Jersey
- Advocates for Children of New Jersey
- Bridges to Learning
- Family Voices New Jersey
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) New Jersey Chapter
- New Jersey Association for the Education of Young Children (NJAEYC)

New Mexico
- All Faiths Children’s Advocacy Center
- American Academy of Pediatrics – New Mexico Chapter
- Brindle Foundation
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) New Mexico Chapter
- New Mexico Voices for Children

New York
- All Our Kin
- American Academy of Pediatrics – New York Chapter 3
- ANDRUS
- Association to Benefit Children
- Bronx Defenders
- Brooklyn Defender Services
- Catholic Charities Community Maternity Services
- Center for Children’s Initiatives
- Center for Family Representation
- Child and Family Services
- Child Welfare Organizing Project
- Children’s Aid
- Children’s Defense Fund – New York
- Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc.
- Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
- Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
- Forestdale, Inc.
- JCCA
- Jewish Board
- Martin de Porres Group Homes
- MercyFirst
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Greater New York Chapter
(New York continued)

- New York Association for the Education of Young Children (NYAEYC)
- New York City Administration for Children's Services
- New York State Association for Infant Mental Health
- Northern River Family of Services
- NYCOAC
- Sanctuary for Families
- Schuyler Center for Analysis & Advocacy Southwest Key Programs
- Society for the Care and Protection of Children
- The Children’s Agenda
- Women’s Housing and Economic Development Corporation

North Carolina

- Alexander Youth Network
- Children First/Communities in Schools of Buncombe County
- Children’s Homes of Iredell County, Inc.
- Child Care Services Association
- Monarch
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – North Carolina Chapter
- NC Child
- North Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children (NCAEYC)
- North Carolina Pediatric Society
- Omni Visions
- Southlight HealthCare
- Timber Ridge Treatment Center, Inc.
- YWCA of Asheville

North Dakota

- Family Voices of North Dakota

Ohio

- Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc. (ABLE)
- Children’s Defense Fund – Ohio
- Justice for Children Project, Moritz College of Law
- Ohio Association for the Education of Young Children (Ohio AEYC)
- Ohio Domestic Violence Network
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Ohio Chapter
- The Ohio Division for Early Childhood

Oklahoma

- American Academy of Pediatrics - Oklahoma Chapter
- Oklahoma Association for the Education of Young Children
- Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy
- Saint Francis Community Services

Oregon

- Children First for Oregon
- Oregon Pediatric Society
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Oregon Chapter
- Northwest Resource Associates
- Youth, Rights and Justice

Pennsylvania

- Pennsylvania Association for the Education of Young Children (PennAEYC)
- Pennsylvania Chapter of DEC
- Public Citizens for Children and Youth (PCCY)
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Pennsylvania/Delaware Valley Chapter
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Pennsylvania/Three Rivers Chapter
- Support Center for Child Advocates
- Three Rivers Adoption Council
- Trying Together
- Youth Service, Inc.
Rhode Island
- Adoption Rhode Island
- Communities for People
- Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children (Rhode Island AEYC)
- Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families
- Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
- St. Mary’s Home for Children

South Carolina
- American Academy of Pediatrics - South Carolina Chapter
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – South Carolina Chapter
- South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center
- South Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children (SCAEYC)
- South Carolina Infant Mental Health Association

South Dakota
- American Academy of Pediatrics - South Dakota Chapter
- South Dakota Association for the Education of Young Children (SDAEYC)
- South Dakota Parent Connection

Tennessee
- Black Children’s Institute of Tennessee
- Harmony Family Center
- Nashville Area Association for the Education of Young Children (NAAEYC)
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Tennessee Chapter
- Omni Visions
- Tennessee Alliance for Children and Families
- Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth
- Tennessee Justice Center

Texas
- Center for Public Policy Priorities
- CHILDREN AT RISK
- Children’s Defense Fund - Texas
- Clarity Child Guidance Center
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Austin, Texas Chapter
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Greater Texas Chapter
- National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Texas Chapter
- Saint Francis Community Services
- Southwest Key Programs
- Texans Care for Children
- Texas Association for the Education of Young Children (Texas AEYC)
- Voices for Children of San Antonio

Utah
- Children's Service Society
- The Adoption Exchange
- Utah Association for the Education of Young Children (UAEYC)
- Voices for Utah Children

Vermont
- Let’s Grow Kids
- Voices for Vermont’s Children

Virginia
- American Academy of Pediatrics - Virginia Chapter
- Legal Aid Justice Center
- Norther Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children (NVAEYC)
- Virginia Association for the Education of Young Children (VAAEYC)
- Virginia Poverty Law Center
- Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance
Washington
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Washington Chapter
- Children’s Alliance
- Legal Counsel for Youth and Children
- National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners – Washington Chapter
- Northwest Resource Associates
- Partners for our Children
- Treehouse
- Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP

West Virginia
- American Academy of Pediatrics – West Virginia Chapter
- TEAM for West Virginia Children
- West Virginia Child Care Association
- West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Wisconsin
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Wisconsin Chapter
- AVAIL, Inc.
- Community Referral Agency
- Embrace Services, Inc.
- End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin
- Family Advocates, Inc.
- Haven Inc.
- Kids Forward
- Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin
- Milwaukee Center for Children and Youth (MCCY)
- One Hope United
- People Against a Violent Environment, Inc. (PAVE)
- Rainbow House Domestic Abuse Services
- Southwest Key Programs
- Stepping Stones, Inc.
- Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies
- Wisconsin Early Childhood Association

Wyoming
- American Academy of Pediatrics – Wyoming Chapter
- UPLIFT
- Wyoming Afterschool Alliance
- Wyoming Community Foundation

Washington, D.C.
- Children's Law Center
- DC Association for the Education of Young Children (DCAEYC)
- Mary’s Center

Puerto Rico
- Centro Pediátrico de Lactancia y Crianza
- Puerto Rico Association for the Education of Young Children
- Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico