

August 28, 2009

RE: Support for H.R. 3531, the Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections for Separated Children Act

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to support the Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections for Separated Children Act, sponsored by Representative Lynn Woolsey (D-CA). This bill would implement critically needed reforms to protect children, families and communities impacted by immigration enforcement.

Enforcement activities conducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") and local law enforcement agencies operating under agreement with ICE too often result in unnecessary harm to children, families and communities. In recent years, ICE has arrested and detained hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom have jobs, homes and U.S. citizen children. Parents who are detained are separated from their children, sometimes permanently, and always at great cost to the family's well-being and the community.

At a time when immigration enforcement is expanding, the HELP Separated Children Act would provide critical, nationwide protocols to help keep children with their parents or caregivers and out of the foster care system while their parent's or caregiver's case is pending by ensuring that vulnerable populations apprehended during immigration enforcement activities are identified and treated with dignity.

When ICE or its surrogates apprehend a parent or caregiver there is no requirement that they be given the opportunity to make childcare arrangements. Furthermore, once they are detained, there is no requirement that parents or caregivers be informed of the location of their children, nor are there any procedures in place to inform children or dependents of the whereabouts of their parents and caregivers. Many parents and caregivers are deported and are unable to arrange to have their children join them in their home country. When children are left behind at any stage in the process they have a high likelihood of ending up in the foster care system.

The HELP Separated Children Act establishes guidelines to regulate immigration enforcement activities to ensure they do not compromise the well-being and unity of children and families. Specifically, the legislation would regulate the initial processing of each individual apprehended, and require the involvement of state and local social service agencies, working in cooperation with local community organizations, to coordinate screenings for vulnerable populations.

The HELP Separated Children Act would also establish a protocol for the release of designated vulnerable individuals, either into the community on bond or parole, or into non-custodial alternatives to detention programs. This bill would save taxpayers millions of dollars and enable members of these vulnerable population groups to return to their families and communities while they go through the immigration system.

Additionally, the HELP Separated Children Act limits enforcement activities in safe zones and the involvement of children in enforcement activities, and would help family members locate those who are detained. It would also ensure that U.S. citizen and lawfully present children in the foster care system as a result of their parent, guardian or caregiver's detention or deportation receive appropriate care and would provide for improved coordination and communication between all the entities involved in the care of separated children and the custody of their parent or caregiver.

We urge you to support this legislation to restore our nation's commitment to family values, human rights, due process, and civil liberties. The federal government's current apprehension methods and detention and removal policies have resulted in traumatized children and broken families. The HELP Separated Children Act will ensure that, as we enforce our laws, we protect the sanctity of the family in American society and uphold our values as a just and dignified nation.

Sincerely,

National Organizations

America's Promise Alliance

ACLU

Alianza: National Latino Alliance for the Elimination of Domestic Violence

American Families United

American Immigration Lawyers Association

American Muslim Voice

American Psychiatric Association

American Humane Association

Amnesty International

Asian American Justice Center

Bill of Rights Defense Committee

Children's Alliance

Children's Defense Fund

Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program

Coalition on Human Needs

Dominican Sisters of Houston

Family Violence Prevention Fund

First Focus

Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center

Foster Care Alumni of America

Friends Committee on National Legislation
Human Rights Watch
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigration Equality
Jubilee Campaign
Kids in Need of Defense
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights
Legal Momentum
League of United Latin American Citizens
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Mental Health America
NAACP
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Sheperd
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC)
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Adoption Law & Policy
National Council of La Raza
National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Foster Care Coalition
NETWORK
Physicians for Human Rights
Salvadoran American National Network
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sojourners
South Asian Americans Leading Together
The Advocates for Human Rights
The Episcopal Church

The Florence Project
The National Advocacy Center of the Good Shepherd
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
USCCB
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Voices for America's Children
Welcoming Immigrants Network
William C. Velasquez Institute
Women's Refugee Commission
World Organization for Human Rights

State and Local Organizations

Arizona

Kino Border Initiative
SIROW

California

Coalition for Humane Rights of Los Angeles
Immigrant Rights Project, Public Counsel
John Burton Foundation
Satrang
Services for Immigrant Rights and Education Network

Colorado

Colorado Progressive Coalition

Florida

Catholic Charities Legal Services, Archdiocese of Miami
Redlands Christian Migrant Association

Georgia

Coalition of Latino Leaders/Coalición de Líderes Latinos
Latinos for Education and Justice Organization, Inc.

Raksha, Inc.

Illinois

Apna Ghar

National Immigrant Justice Center

Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law

Iowa

Child and Family Policy Center

Des Moines Human Rights Commission

Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Iowa Civil Rights Commission

Methodist Federation for Social Action, Iowa Chapter

National Association of Social Workers, Iowa Chapter

Urbandale Civil Rights Commission

Kansas

El Centro Inc.

Kentucky

Kentucky Youth Advocates

Maine

Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project

Maine Children's Alliance

Maine Parent Federation

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Michigan

MAI Family Services

Michigan's Children

New Jersey

Casa Freehold

IRATE/First Friends

Migration and Refugee Services, Diocese of Trenton

New Jersey Immigration Policy Network

Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

New Mexico

Family Matters: Adoption Resources

New York

Council of People's Organization

La Fuente - The New York Civic Participation Project

North Carolina

Action for Children North Carolina

El Pueblo, Inc.

Latin American Coalition

Sisters of the Mercy of the Americas, South Central Community

Ohio

Voices for Ohio's Children

Oregon

Immigration Counseling Service

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Immigrant Resource Center

Sisters of Mercy, Pittsburgh

South Carolina

South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center

United Way of Anderson County (Community Impact/Success by 6)

Tennessee

Conexión Américas

Texas

ACLU of Texas

American Gateways (formerly PAPA)

Border Network for Human Rights

Center for Public Policy Priorities

Daya

Texans Care For Children

Texas Indigenous Council

Texas United for Families

Utah

Voices for Utah Children

Virginia

Reston Interfaith

Tahirih Justice Center

Voices for Virginia's Children

Vermont

Vermont Family Network

Voices for Vermont's Children

Washington

Children's Home Society of WA

Wisconsin

Voces de la Frontera

District of Columbia

Ayuda

Latin American Youth Center