

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 7, 2018

President Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We are writing to ask that you reverse course on your Administration's inhumane decision to separate children from their parents at the border. This policy has traumatized children who are fleeing extreme violence. Our government has a humanitarian duty to the children and families seeking asylum in the United States to end this policy immediately.

Your Administration's decision to separate children from their parents at the border is cruel, unnecessary, and goes against our values as Americans. Furthermore, reports that the Administration is considering measures that would make it more difficult for parents and relatives to sponsor children in Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody¹ also raise serious concerns. Many of the children and families arriving at our Southwest border have escaped horrific violence and persecution in their home countries. The decision to use this separation tactic as a "deterrent" is not only frighteningly callous, but demonstrates willful ignorance of the violence and unlivable circumstances many families are risking their lives to escape.

Separating a child from his or her parents has lasting, harmful, and traumatizing impacts. These separations have been shown to increase anxiety and depression among children that have already experienced significant trauma in their home countries and along their journey to the United States.² As the President of the American Academy for Pediatrics stated, "highly stressful experiences, like family separation, can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress - known as toxic stress - can carry lifelong consequences for children."³

In recognition of the trauma associated with removing children from their parents and the adverse effects of unnecessary institutionalization, our national foster care policies have moved in a direction that prioritizes keeping families together and decreasing the use of congregate care.

¹ Foley, E. & Planas, R. (May 25, 2018). Trump's crackdown on immigrant parents puts more kids in an already strained system. The Huffington Post. Available: https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/immigrant-children-separated-from-parents_us_5b087b90e4b0802d69cb4070

² Suarez-Orozco, C., Bang, H. J., Kim, H. Y. (2011). I felt like my heart was staying behind: Psychological implications of family separations & reunifications for immigrant youth. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 26(2), 222-257.

³ Kraft, C. (May 8, 2018). AAP Statement Opposing separation of children and parents at the border. Available: <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/StatementOpposingSeparationofChildrenandParents.aspx>

Best practices in child welfare promote keeping children and their parents safely together unless removal is in the child's best interest. Unnecessarily separating more children from their parents will further exacerbate the lack of family-based foster care placements available and increase the use of large-capacity institutional settings, such as abandoned military bases, to house these children. White House Chief of Staff, John Kelly, recently remarked that children separated from their parents can be placed in "foster care or whatever."⁴ This comment fails to recognize the best interest of children as well as the lack of resources our country currently allocates to support quality child welfare services.

There is no legitimate reason why these children need to be separated from their parents. Community-based alternatives to detention programs, like intensive case management and referrals to social services and legal resources, have been shown to increase the likelihood that immigrants appear at court proceedings. These methods are significantly more cost-effective and allow families to stay together while their cases are being processed. The Vera Institute of Justice - Appearance Assistance Program (AAP) operated in New York City from February 1997 to March 2000. It found that at the end of the project, over 90% of participants had attended all required court hearings, and that supervision was 55% less expensive than detention for asylum seekers and 15% less expensive for lawful permanent residents with criminal records.⁵ These are clearly more humane and effective methods than family separation or family detention.

We ask that your Administration rescind this unethical, ineffective, and inhumane policy and instead prioritize approaches that align with our humanitarian and American values.

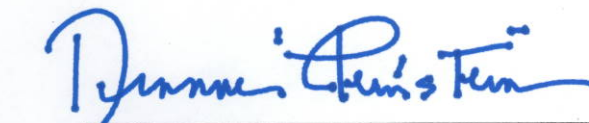
Sincerely,




RON WYDEN
United States Senator



PATTY MURRAY
United States Senator



DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senator



CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
United States Senator

⁴ NPR Morning Edition (May 29, 2018). Available: <https://www.npr.org/2018/05/29/615079848/following-up-on-1-500-missing-immigrant-children-in-the-u-s>

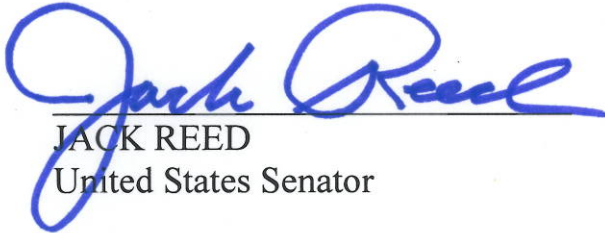
⁵ Detention Watch Network (August 2010). Policy Brief: Community based alternatives to immigration detention. Available: https://law.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/default/files/child-page/163220/doc/slspublic/DWN_ATD_Report_FINAL.pdf



TOM UDALL
United States Senator



EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senator



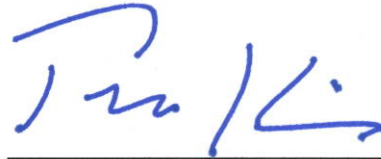
JACK REED
United States Senator



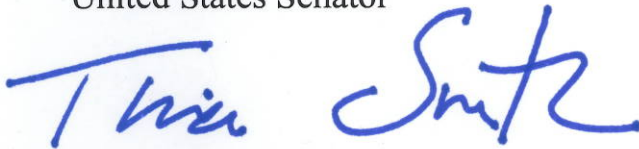
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United States Senator



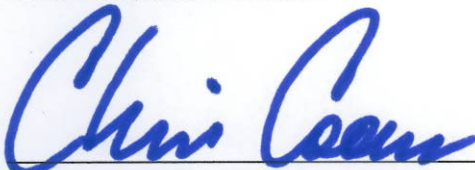
TIM KAINE
United States Senator



TINA SMITH
United States Senator



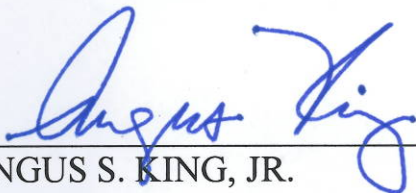
BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senator



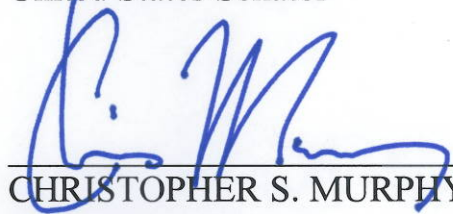
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United States Senator



KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
United States Senator



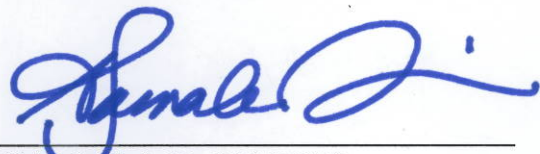
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KAMALA D. HARRIS
United States Senator



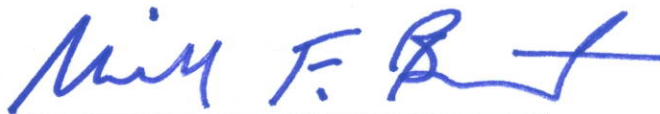
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MARIA CANTWELL
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TAMMY BALDWIN
United States Senator



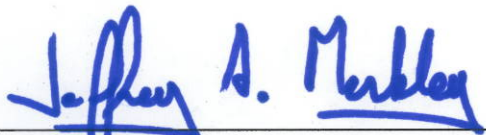
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MAZIE K. HIRONO
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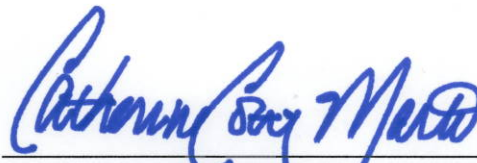
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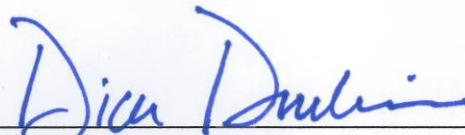
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
United States Senator



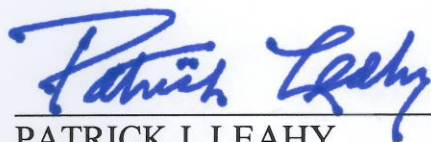
CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO
United States Senator



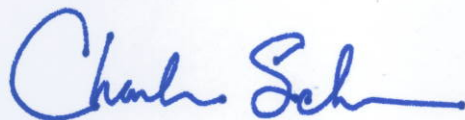
BILL NELSON
United States Senator



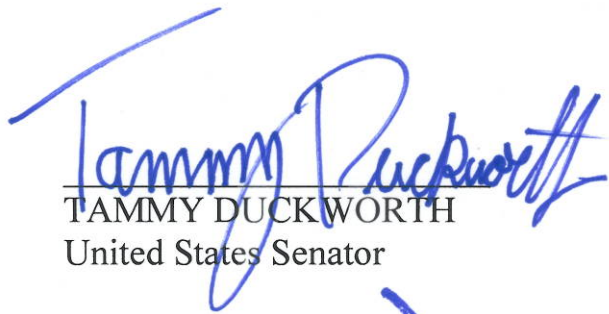
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United States Senator



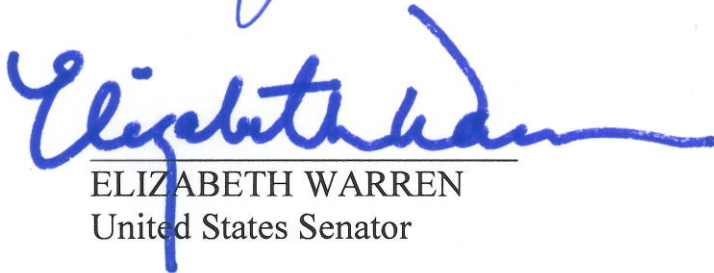
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