

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Democratic Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

August 21, 2019

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader McCarthy, Leader McConnell, and Leader Schumer:

The undersigned organizations, which are committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and the well-being of children, write to express our grave concern with the ongoing treatment of children at the United States border. As child welfare advocates with expertise in the impact of trauma on children, we are deeply alarmed by the reports of government-sanctioned conditions and separations, which knowingly expose children to emotional abuse and physical injury and draw clear comparisons to child abuse. We urge Congress and the Administration to immediately end these abusive acts toward children.

Despite an official end to the Administration's Zero Tolerance Policy, recent reports have made clear that the federal government continues to separate children from parents and other caregivers with whom they arrive, including aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. Reports have also made clear that the standard of risk needed to justify a child's separation from a caregiver is often not being met; therefore, the government's actions are decidedly not in the best interest of the child and causing serious emotional harm. These ongoing separations are unjustified, unlawful, and deeply detrimental to children's well-being.

Separation, detention, cages, deplorable physical and hygiene conditions, bullying and intimidation by guards, and being held in enormous institutional facilities reflect traumatic practices in direct conflict with what science tells us about healthy child development. Traumatic experiences, toxic stress, and prolonged exposure to unsafe conditions, like those children are experiencing in ICE and CBP custody, have lifelong consequences for children. The U.S. government must stop intentionally subjecting children to these experiences, separating children from parents and caregivers, and holding them in conditions of confinement that violate state child abuse statutes across the country.

It is unconscionable that the federal government would sanction conditions of confinement for children that can be equated to child abuse as part of any policy. For both U.S.-born children and immigrant children, the government has a responsibility to ensure safety and prevent an unreasonable risk of harm. The current policies at the border do not meet this minimal standard.

We urge the Administration take swift action to ensure children are never detained for more than 72 hours in CBP facilities and to ensure that all CBP facilities that temporarily house children provide safe conditions that do not expose children to an unreasonable risk of physical or mental harm. We also call on the U.S. Congress to take swift action if the Administration will not. The members of this Coalition are ready and eager to join with the Administration and the U.S. Congress to consider how to best achieve this goal.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Strong Families and Communities
American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children
American Psychological Association
Boys Town
Buffett Early Childhood Fund
Center for the Study of Social Policy
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Advocacy Institute
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Law Center
Committee for Children
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates
Educare Learning Network
Family Focused Treatment Association
First Five Years Fund
First Focus on Children
Foster America
International Social Service, USA
Juvenile Law Center
MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership
National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
National Association of Social Workers
National Center for Youth Law
National Child Abuse Coalition
National Children's Alliance
National Family Support Network
National Foster Parent Association
National Foundation to End Child Abuse and Neglect
National Network for Youth
National Nurse-Led Care Consortium
National Respite Coalition
National Youth Advocate Program, Inc.
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
North American Council on Adoptable Children
Ounce of Prevention Fund
Parents Anonymous Inc
Prevent Child Abuse America
Ray Helfer Society
Rights4Girls
The Washington Children's Foundation
Voice for Adoption
Within Our Reach
Youth Villages
Zero to Three

Alaska

Alaska's Children Trust

Arizona

Child and Family Resources, Inc.
Human Services Consultants, LLC

California

A Greater Hope
Advokids
Alternative Family Services
Aviva Family & Children's Service
California Alliance of Child and Family Services
California Family Resource Association
Children Now
Cope Family Center
Family Care Network, Inc.
Five Acres
Futuro Infantil Hispano, FFA
Hathaway-Sycamores
Legal Services for Children
Safe & Sound
Saving Innocence
Temple Beth El
The Village Family Services

Colorado

Illuminate Colorado

Connecticut

Child & Family Agency of Southeastern Connecticut
Children's Community Programs of Connecticut

Delaware

Children & Families First

Florida

Florida's Children First
Southern Legal Counsel, Inc.

Georgia

CHRIS 180
Hillside, Inc.

Iowa

Families First Counseling Services

Idaho

Idaho Children's Trust Fund/Prevent Child Abuse Idaho

Illinois

Alternative Schools Network
Children's Home & Aid
DuPage Early Childhood Collaboration
Erikson Institute
EverThrive Illinois
Illinois Action for Children
Illinois Collaboration on Youth
Kaleidoscope
One Hope United
Peoria County Bright Futures
SEIU Healthcare

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions
YWCA Metropolitan Chicago

Indiana

Family Service Society, Inc.
Prevent Child Abuse Indiana
The Phoenix Institute
The Villages

Kansas

Children's Alliance of Kansas
EmberHope Youthville
FosterAdopt Connect
Kansas Appleseed

Louisiana

Kingsley House

Massachusetts

Ascentria Care Alliance
Children's League of Massachusetts
Children's Trust, Inc.
HopeWell
Massachusetts Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
North American Family Institute
Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps

Maryland

Center for Adoption Support and Education
Maryland Essentials for Childhood
Maryland State Council on Child Abuse & Neglect
Prevent Child Abuse Maryland/The Family Tree
Prince George's County DSS
Prince George's Child Resource Center
Sweet Sorrel

Maine

Maine Children's Trust
Volunteers of America Northern New England

Michigan

Bethany Christian Services
Catholic Social Services of the Upper Peninsula
Child Advocacy Program
Child and Family Charities
Child and Family Services Northeast Michigan
Child and Family Services of Northwestern Michigan
D.A. Blodgett-St. John's
Family & Children Services
Family Builders Network
Fostering Futures
Hope Network Behavioral Health Services
Livingston County Catholic Charities
Methodist Children's Home Society
Michigan Children's Trust Fund
Michigan Federation for Children and Families

Ruth Ellis Center, Inc.
Spaulding for Children
Starr Commonwealth
Teaching Family Homes of Upper Michigan
Wedgwood Christian Services
West Michigan Partnership for Children

Minnesota

Ampersand Families
AspireMN
Minnesota Communities Caring for Children, Home of Prevent Child Abuse MN
West Central Initiative

Missouri

FosterAdopt Connect
Missouri Coalition of Children's Agencies

Montana

Prevent Child Abuse Montana

Nebraska

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Voices for Children in Nebraska

New Jersey

Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Cornerstone Family Programs
Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless
New Dover United Methodist Church
New Jersey Alliance for Children Youth and Families
Partnering for Prevention, LLC
Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey
Visions and Pathways
Zion Lutheran Church

New Mexico

All Faiths Children's Advocacy Center
The City of Albuquerque

Nevada

Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada

New York

Catholic Guardian Services
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (NYS)
Family and Children's Association
Family Service Society, Inc.
Ibero American Action League
Prevent Child Abuse New York
The Children's Village
United Neighborhood Houses

North Carolina

The Together Facing the Challenge Program
Child Care Services Association
NC Child
Thompson Child and Family Focus

Ohio

Adoption Network Cleveland

Oklahoma

Policy & Performance Consultants, Inc.

Oregon

Child & Family Advocacy Clinic
Children First for Oregon
Children's Institute
FosterClub
Hacienda CDC
Old Mill Center for Children and Families
Parenting Now!
Pearl Buck Center
Prevent Child Abuse Oregon
Yachats Youth & Family Activities Program, Inc.

Pennsylvania

Auberle
Delta Community Supports
Family Services of Montgomery County
Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research
Harborcreek Youth Services
Jewish Family and Children Services
Outreach Center for Community Resources
Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth & Family Services
Pennsylvania Family Support Alliance
Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership
Pinebrook Family Answers
Pressley Ridge
Union City Family Support Center

Puerto Rico

Proyecto Nacer, Inc.

Rhode Island

Adoption Rhode Island
Child & Family
Community Care Alliance
Foster Forward
Rhode Island Coalition for Children and Families
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

Tennessee

Omni Visions, Inc.

Texas

DFW Foster Parent Association
Ella Austin Community Center
Praesidium

Sequel Youth and Family Services
TexProtects
Texas Pediatric Society, Texas Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

Virginia

Braley & Thompson and Kids in Focus
City of Richmond, Department of Social Services
Families Forward/Prevent Child Abuse Virginia
Lutheran Family Services of Virginia

Vermont

Prevent Child Abuse Vermont

Washington

Children's Home Society of Washington
Community and Family Services Foundation
HopeSparks Family Services
Partners for Our Children
Washington Association for Children and Families

West Virginia

TEAM for West Virginia Children / Prevent Child Abuse West Virginia
West Virginia Child Care Association

Wisconsin

The Social Development Commission
Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies
Wisconsin Early Childhood Association