

July 21, 2011

RE: Support for the Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections (HELP) for Separated Children Act

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to support the Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections (HELP) for Separated Children Act, legislation introduced by Senator Franken (D-MN) and Representative Woolsey (D-CA-6). Though the bills differ slightly, both would implement much needed reforms in existing protocols to protect children, families and communities from the unintended consequences of immigration enforcement.

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

Currently, when ICE or its surrogates apprehend a parent or caregiver, there is no requirement that they be given the opportunity to make childcare arrangements. If parents and caregivers are detained, there is no requirement that they be informed of the location of their children, permitted to communicate with child welfare agencies, able to comply with reunification plans or able to participate in family court proceedings. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that detained parents will have sufficient time and access prior to deportation to obtain travel documents for their children. As a result, many parents and caregivers who are deported are unable to arrange for their children to join them in their home country. Unnecessary separations of children from their parents threaten the child's safety, security and long-term development and should be avoided wherever possible.

The HELP for Separated Children Act would establish nationwide protocols to ensure that parents and caregivers apprehended during immigration enforcement are identified and treated with special concern for the well-being of their minor children. They would also prevent children from unnecessary placement in foster care while their parent's or caregiver's immigration case is pending.

Specifically, the bills require that ICE and its surrogates follow certain procedures to determine whether apprehended individuals have children or dependents in the United States. If individuals are believed to be parents or caregivers, ICE would be required to consider the best interest of children in decisions to detain the parent or caregiver and to facilitate parents' and caregivers' ability to make childcare arrangements, if necessary.

The bills would also establish procedures to ensure that detained parents are able to participate in family court proceedings and would improve coordination and communication between all the entities involved in the care and custody of separated children. Additionally, they would ensure that detained parents can comply with family court orders, reunification plans and other custody-related requirements. Furthermore, the bills would ensure that detained parents and caregivers are allowed regular telephone contact and visitation with their children, and can access attorneys and consular staff before they sign legal documents. The HELP for Separated Children Act would also require that detained parents and caregivers have the time and ability to obtain necessary travel documents so that they can bring their child to their home country if they are deported. Finally, the bills would require the federal government to document the impact of immigration enforcement activities on children and families through an annual report.

These procedures and safeguards are necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of all children. They will save taxpayers millions of dollars by reducing the number of children who are unnecessarily placed into the foster care system and will improve the likelihood that children of detained parents will be able to reunify with their parents upon their release or deportation.

The federal government's current apprehension methods and detention and removal policies have resulted in traumatized children and broken families. We therefore urge you to support the HELP for Separated Children Act to restore our nation's commitment to child welfare and family values.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL

American Academy of Pediatrics
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
American Humane Association
American Immigration Lawyers Association
American Jewish Committee
American Muslim Voice Foundation
America's Promise Alliance
America's Voice Education Fund
Amnesty International USA
Applied Research Center
Asian American Justice Center, Member of Asian American Center for Advancing Justice
Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)
Committee for Hispanic Children and Families, Inc.
The Episcopal Church
Families for Freedom
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Family-based Treatment Association
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities

Human Rights Watch
Immigrant Child Advocacy Project, University of Chicago
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigration Equality
Irish Apostolate USA
Jewish Labor Committee, Western Region
Kids In Need of Defense (KIND)
Legal Momentum
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
MomsRising
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Assembly on School-Based Health Care
National Association of Social Workers
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Consumers League
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of La Raza
National Education Association
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC)
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
NETWORK, A National Catholic Justice Lobby
Pax Christi USA
Rights Working Group
SEIU
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
United We Dream
Voices for America's Children
Women's Refugee Commission
ZERO TO THREE

LOCAL & STATE ORGANIZATIONS

Arizona

Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Children's Action Alliance
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project
Ginger Ward Southwest Human Development
Goldman & Goldman, PC

California

California Rural Legal Association Foundation
Children Now
Children's Rights Project, Public Counsel, UCLA School of Law
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of LA (CHIRLA)
East Bay Community Law Center
Immigrant Rights Project, Public Counsel, UCLA School of Law
Korean Resource Center
Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights, San Francisco
Legal Services for Children, San Francisco
Youth Law Center, San Francisco

Colorado

Servicios de La Raza

District of Columbia

Ayuda
Latin American Youth Center

Florida

Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center
Florida Immigrant Coalition
Law Offices of Linda Friedman Ramirez, PA
Miami-Dade Green Party

Georgia

Georgia Rural Urban Summit

Illinois

8th Day Center for Justice, Chicago
Illinois Maternal and Child Health Coalition
Korean American Resource & Cultural Center
Project IRENE
Scott D. Pollock & Associates, P.C.

Maine

Maine Children's Alliance

Maryland

Advocates for Children and Youth
Maryland Multicultural Youth Centers

Massachusetts

Boston University School of Law, Civil Litigation Program
Political Asylum/Immigration Representation Project

Michigan

Immigration Law Clinic, Michigan State University College of Law
Michigan's Children

Minnesota

Advocates for Human Rights
American Immigration Lawyers Association – Minnesota/Dakotas Chapter
Benedictine-Franciscan Immigrant Justice Committee
Casa Guadalupana Catholic Worker House
Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis
Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud
Centro Campensino
Children's Defense Fund-Minnesota
Children's Law Center of Minnesota
Church of All Nations
Church of Christ
Church of the Ascension
El Milagro Lutheran Church - Church Council and Congregation
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - Northeast Minnesota Synod Task Force on Immigration
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America - Saint Paul Area Synod
The Family Partnership
Hmong American Partnership
Hospitality Minnesota
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Interfaith Coalition on Immigration MN (ICOM)
Islamic Civic Society of America
Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action
Jewish Community Action (JCA)
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in Minnesota
Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota
Metropolitan Consortium of Community Developers
Mid-Minnesota Legal Assistance
Midwest Food Processors Association
Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights
Minnesota AFL-CIO
Minnesota Agri-Growth Council
Minnesota Alliance With Youth
Minnesota Business Immigration Coalition
Minnesota Catholic Conference
Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ - Justice and Witness Team
Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ - Immigration Task Force
Minnesota Council of Churches
Minnesota Lodging Association

Minnesota Milk Producers Association
Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association
Minnesota Restaurant Association
Minnesota School Social Workers Association
Mobilizing and Organizing for Victory and Empowerment (MOVE)
No More Children Left Behind
Peace and Hope International
Project for Pride in Living
Service Employees International Union - Local 26
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and Consociates - Immigration Working Group
Somali Action Alliance
St. Bridget/St. Bernard Catholic Churches - Social Justice Team of the Greater Stewartville Area
St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church
St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church
St. Luke Presbyterian Church - Peace and Justice Focus Group
United Food & Commercial Workers Union – Local 6 (Albert Lea)
United Food & Commercial Workers Union – Local 9 (Austin)
United Food & Commercial Workers Union – Local 1161 (Worthington)
United Food & Commercial Workers Union - Local 1189 (St. Paul & Duluth)
UNITE-HERE – State Council
Willmar Area Comprehensive Immigration Reform
Witness for Peace-Upper Midwest

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Bob Englund, Richfield, MN
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Nathan Klatt, Willmar, MN
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Rabbi Amy Eilberg, Jay Phillips Center for Jewish-Christian Learning, MN
Rabbi Avi Olitzky, Beth El Synagogue, MN
Rabbi David Lockets, Bet Shalom Congregation, MN
Rabbi Harold Kravitz, Adath Jeshurun, MN
Rabbi Michael Latz, Shir Tikvah Congregation, MN
Rabbi Morris J. Allen, Beth Jacob Congregation, MN
Rabbi Norman Cohen, Bet Shalom Congregation, MN
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Reverend Duane Addison, Fridley, MN
Reverend John Guttermann, United Church of Christ pastor, New Brighton, MN
Reverend Jonathan Zielske, Hope Lutheran Church, ELCA, Saint Paul, MN
Reverend Judith VanOsdol, Pastor, El Milagro Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN
Reverend Matthew Hunter, Executive Director, Community Shares of Minnesota, MN
Reverend Naomi Mahler, Willmar, MN
Reverend Paula Bidle, Minneapolis, MN
Reverend Randall J. Romsdahl, Shakopee, MN
Reverend Richard Wagner, Saint Louis Park, MN
Reverend Robert Munneke, Aitkin, MN
Reverend Susan Maetzold Moss, The Episcopal Church in Minnesota, MN
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Sister Agatha Grossman, Saint Paul, MN
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Sister Joan Groschen, MN
Sister Pat Binka, MN
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Steve Croashe, Minneapolis, MN
Steve Marquardt, Lake Lillian, MN
Susan Campe, Minneapolis, MN
Susan George, Minneapolis, MN
Susan Kolze, Minneapolis, MN
Susan Mullin, Brooklyn Park, MN
Susan P. Stemme, Richfield, MN
Susan Schirber, Minneapolis, MN
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Trish Parry, Minneapolis, MN
Trudy Genrich, Minneapolis, MN
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Vicki Wunsch, Minneapolis, MN
William Forsman, Eagan, MN
William Smith, Minneapolis, MN

New Jersey

Casa Esperanza
IRATE & First Friends
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

New Mexico

New Mexico Women's Justice Project
New Mexico Voices for Children
PB&J Family Services, Inc., Albuquerque
Women's Intercultural Center

New York

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
New Sanctuary Coalition of New York City
New York Immigration Coalition

North Carolina

Action for Children North Carolina

Oregon

CASA Voices for Children
Children First for Oregon

Pennsylvania

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Immigration Resource Center

Tennessee

The Black Children's Institute of Tennessee

Texas

Center for Public Policy Priorities
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Wilco Justice Alliance

Utah

Voices for Utah Children

Virginia

Voices for Virginia's Children

Washington

Children's Home Society of Washington