

July 21, 2010

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

Dear Senator:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to support the HELP Separated Children Act, sponsored by Senator Al Franken (D-MN). This bill would implement critically needed reforms to protect children 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 U.S. citizen children. Parents who are detained are separated from their children, sometimes permanently, and always at great cost to the well-being of the family and the community.

At a time when immigration enforcement continues to expand, the HELP Separated Children Act would provide critical, nationwide protocols to prevent children from unnecessary placement in foster care while their parent’s or caregiver’s case is pending. It would do so by ensuring that parents and caregivers apprehended during immigration enforcement are identified and treated with special concern for the best interest of their minor children.

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 they are detained, there is no requirement that parents or caregivers be informed of the location of their children or be permitted to communicate with child welfare agencies and comply with reunification plans. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that detained parents will have sufficient time and access prior to removal to obtain travel documents for their children. As a result, many parents and caregivers who are deported are unable to arrange to have their children join them in their home country. Unnecessary separations of children from their parents threaten the child’s safety, security, well-being and longer-term development and should be avoided whenever possible.

The HELP Separated Children Act establishes guidelines for immigration enforcement actions that will ensure that these actions do not unnecessarily harm children and families. Specifically, the legislation would require that state child welfare agencies and NGOs be granted access to all individuals who have an ICE detainer lodged against them or who are in the physical custody of the Department of Homeland Security to assist in determining whether the individual is a parent, legal guardian, or primary caregiver of a child in the United States. It would also require that anyone believed to be a parent or guardian be granted phone calls to make care arrangements for their children.

The HELP Separated Children Act would also require that apprehended parents, legal guardians, and primary caregivers who cannot be released remain in the area in which they were apprehended until care arrangements have been made for their child. Furthermore, it would promote family reunification at the time a parent's or caregiver's immigration case concludes by ensuring that detained parents can communicate with their children, the child welfare system, and family courts. This legislation would reduce unnecessary strain on children and save taxpayers millions of dollars by reducing the likelihood that children will be placed unnecessarily into the foster care system.

We urge you to support this legislation to restore our nation's commitment to child welfare and family values. 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.

Sincerely,

National Organizations:

AFL-CIO
America's Promise Alliance
American Humane Association
American Immigration Lawyers Association
American Muslim Voice
American Nursery & Landscape Association
Amnesty International USA
Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum
Asian American Justice Center
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance
Bridging Group
Catholic Charities USA
Center for Asian Pacific Islander
Center for Farmworker Families
Child Welfare League of America
Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program
The Episcopal Church
Every Child Matters Education Fund
Family Violence Prevention Fund
First Focus Campaign for Children
Foster Care Alumni of America
Foster Family-based Treatment Association
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)
Human Rights Watch
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Immigration Equality

Juvenile Law Center
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Latino Commission on AIDS
Legal Momentum
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. – Washington Office
Midwest Coalition for Human Rights
Moms Rising
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of Social Workers
National Consumers League
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
National Council of La Raza
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Foster Care Coalition
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium
National Latino AIDS Action Network
National Policy Partnership
OCA
Physicians for Human Rights
Saavedra Law Firm
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, South Central Community
Sojourners
South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Voices for America's Children
Women's Refugee Commission
Youth Build USA
Zero to Three

State and Local Organizations:

Arizona

Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Children's Action Alliance

Florence Project
Global Family Legal Services
MEChA Arizona Student Union
Tumbleweed, Center for Youth Development

Arkansas

Arkansas Voices

California

Asian Law Alliance
California Immigrant Policy Center
Children Now
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
East Bay Community Law Center
International Institute of the Bay Area
Public Counsel

Colorado

Lutheran Advocacy Ministries
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network

Connecticut

Connecticut Voices for Children

District of Columbia

Ayuda
The Episcopal Church

Florida

Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center
Florida Legal Services, Inc.
Gulfcoast Legal Services, Inc.
Legal Aid Society of the Orange County Bar Association, Inc.
Legal Ministry H.E.L.P., Inc.

Georgia

Asian American Legal Advocacy Center, Inc. (AALAC) of Georgia
Georgia Rural Urban Summit
Latinos for Education & Justice Organization

Illinois

Instituto del Progreso Latino
Maria Baldini-Potermin & Associates

Iowa

Child and Family Policy Center

Lutheran Services in Iowa
National Association of Social Workers, Iowa Chapter

Kentucky

Kentucky Youth Advocates

Louisiana

New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice

Maine

Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project

Maine Children's Alliance

Maryland

CASA de Maryland

Lutheran Office on Public Policy

Michigan

Bethany Children's Services

Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project

Michigan's Children

Minnesota

Advocates for Human Rights

American Immigration Lawyers Association, Minnesota/Dakotas Chapter

Ascension Church

Benedictine-Franciscan Immigrant Justice Commission (St. Joseph & Little Falls, MN)

Casa Guadalupe

Catholic Charities of St. Paul & Minneapolis

Center for Asian Pacific Islanders

Center for Mission, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

Children's Defense Fund Minnesota

Children's Law Center of Minnesota

Chinese Social Service Center

Church World Service

Congregational Council, the Miracle Lutheran Church

Department of Social Concerns, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud

Family & Children's Service

Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls

Great River Interfaith Partnership

Hmong American Partnership

Hospitality Minnesota

Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota

Immigration Task Force, Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ

Interfaith Coalition on Immigration

ISALAH

Jewish Community Action
Justice Commission of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet and
Consociates
Latin America & Haiti Focus Group, St. Luke's Presbyterian Church
Legal Rights Center
Lutheran Coalition for Public Policy in Minnesota
Lutheran Social Service 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 Fathers & Families Network
Minnesota Hispanic Bar Association
Minnesota Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Minnesota Lodging Association
Minnesota Milk Producers Association
Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association
Minnesota Restaurant Association
Minnesota School Social Workers Association
Minnesota Strengthening Our Lives (SOL)
No More Children Left Behind
Office of Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation, School Sisters of Notre
Dame, Mankato
Project for Pride in Living
Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Local 26 – Minneapolis
Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Minnesota State Council
Sisters Online
Social Concerns & Family Office, Diocese of New Ulm
Sowers Leadership Team, Guardian Angels Catholic Church
St. John Neumann Catholic Church
The Minneapolis Foundation
UFCW Local 1161 – Worthington
UFCW Local 789 – South St. Paul
UNITE Here, Minnesota State Council
United Cambodian Association of Minnesota
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Local 1161 – Worthington
United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Local 789 – South St. Paul
Willmar Area Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Minnesota Faith Leaders, Elected Officials & Community Advocates

Rabbi Morris J. Allen, Beth Jacob Congregation

Rabbi Renee Bauer, Mayim Rabim Congregation

Rev. Ralph Baumgartner, Galilee Lutheran Church, Roseville, MN

Rev. Chris Becker, Peace Lutheran Church, Inver Grove Heights, MN

Pastor Chris Berthelsen, First Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN

Rev. Mariann Budde, St. John's Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, MN

Pastor Sarah Campbell, Mayflower Community Congregational Church, Minneapolis, MN

Mayor Chris Coleman, City of St. Paul

Rev. Doug Donley, University Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, Jay Phillips Center for Jewish-Christian Learning

Pastor Paul Erickson, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, St. Paul, MN

Rev. James Erlandson, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, St. Paul, MN

Rev. G. Allen Foster, Citadel of Hope Church, Brooklyn Park, MN

Pastor Pam Fickenscher, Edina Community Lutheran Church, Edina, MN

Luz María Frías, Human Rights & Equal Economic Opportunity Dept., City of St. Paul

Pastor Dan Garnaas, Grace University Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, MN

Rev. Chad Gilbertson, Willmar, MN

Revs. Patrick & Luisa Cabello Hansel, Minneapolis Area Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minneapolis, MN

Rev. Richard Headen, Presbyterian Church USA, Plymouth, MN

Allan D. Henden, Lay Leader, United Church of Christ, Minneapolis, MN

Rev. Karen Hering, Unity Unitarian Church, St. Paul, MN

Rev. Anita C. Hill, St. Paul, MN

Loan T. Huynh, Attorney at Law

Bishop Craig E. Johnson, Minneapolis Area Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minneapolis, MN

Elder Karen Larson, St. Luke Presbyterian Church, Minnetonka, MN

Rabbi Michael Latz, Shir Tikvah Congregation

Charles & Hertha Lutz, Peace and Justice Advocates, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Minneapolis, MN

Miguel Lucas Lindgren, DFL Latino Caucus Treasurer, Roseville, MN

Brianna MacPhee, Executive Board, Minnesota Latino Caucus, Minneapolis, MN

Pastor Rod Maeker, Faculty (ret.), Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN

Rev. Naomi Mahler, Paz y Esperanza Lutheran Church, Willmar, MN

Pastor Susan Maetzold Moss, Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota

Sen. Mee Moua (Dist. 67), Chair, Minnesota Senate Judiciary Committee, St. Paul, MN

Lauren Morse-Wendt, Mission and Ministry Developer, Edina, MN

Pastor Richard Mork, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, St. Paul, MN

Rev. Jen Nagel, Salem English Lutheran, Minneapolis, MN

Rev. Karsten Nelson, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN

Rev. Keith H. Olstad, St. Paul-Reformation Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN

Rafael Ortega, Ramsey County Commissioner

Pastor Paul Slack, New Creation Community Church, Brooklyn Park, MN

Rev. Dr. Karen Smith Sellers, Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ
Roxanne Smith, Social Justice Dir., St. Joseph the Worker Church, Maple Grove, MN
Chief Tom Smith, St. Paul Police Department
Pastor Grant Stevensen, St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, St. Paul, MN
Rabbi Adam Stock Spilke, Mount Zion Temple
Pastor Eric Strand, Edina Community Church, Edina, MN
Rev. Dale Stuepfert, Director of Chaplaincy (ret.), Hennepin County Medical Center,
Minneapolis, MN
Pastor Steve Sylvester, Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Circle Pines, MN
Linda Thompson, Lay Leader, St. Luke Presbyterian Church, Plymouth, MN
Sen. Patricia Torres Ray (District 62)
Rev. Jill Tollefson, La Mision San Jose Obrero de Episcopal, Montgomery, MN
Rev. Susan Tjornehoj, Minneapolis Area Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America, Minneapolis, MN
Pastor Jason Van Hunnik, Westwood Lutheran Church, St. Louis Park, MN
Pastor Mark Vinge, House of Hope Lutheran Church, New Hope, MN
Rev. David Wangaard, Minneapolis Area Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America, Minneapolis, MN
Pastor Mark Wegener, Woodlake Lutheran Church, Richfield, MN
Rev. Bruce M. Westphal, Westwood Lutheran Church, St. Louis Park, MN
Rev. Jonathan Zielske, Hope Lutheran Church

New Jersey

Association for Children of New Jersey
Casa Esperanza
IRATE & First Friends
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

New Mexico

For Families, LLC.
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry
New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Protective Services Division
New Mexico Women's Justice Project
PBJ Family Services, Inc.

New York

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families
Make the Road New York
The Osborne Association
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

North Carolina

Action for Children North Carolina
The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center

Oklahoma

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

Oregon

Immigration Counseling Services (Portland, OR)

South Carolina

South Carolina Appleseed

Texas

Catholic Charities of Dallas, Inc., Immigration & Legal Services

Center for Public Policy Priorities

Daya Inc.

Human Rights Initiative of North Texas

Wilco Justice Alliance

Virginia

Voices for Virginia's Children

Washington

Children's Home Society of Washington

Northwest Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project