

June 5, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Robert Goodlatte
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jerry Nadler
Ranking Member, House Judiciary Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Chairman Goodlatte, and Ranking Member Nadler:

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal budget and policy decisions we write to ask that you consider the following proposals to put an end to the inhumane practice of separating children from their families at the U.S. border (H.R. 5414, H.R. 5950, H.R. 2043, H.R. 2573). It is imperative that Congress and the administration do not use the torture of children and families for deterrence tactics or immigration enforcement.

In May, the Trump administration issued a zero-tolerance policy for families crossing the U.S. border. According to a recent report, 1,887 new children are now in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) since the enactment of this policy just one month ago.¹ This initiative has created a new category of unaccompanied children who will rely on HHS for their safety and well-being. While the stated purpose is to uphold the rule of law, cruelty as a deterrence tactic has been the point of this initiative from the start. Congress and the administration must work together to find solutions to the immigration debate that do not treat children and families as collateral damage.

The Protect Family Values at the Border Act (H.R. 2572) would require the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to establish basic humane treatment standards for immigrants in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). This bill also aims to ensure that the best interest of the child is taken into account when determining repatriation or referral for prosecution of parents and legal guardians of children. Separately detaining children and their parents is costly and causes additional trauma for children and parents alike. Additionally, this bill ensures that CBP personnel receive training with regards to procedures and policies that pertain to the best interest of the child.

The Help Separated Families Act of 2018 (H.R. 5414) combats the stress felt by families by ensuring that the immigration status of a parent, legal guardian, or relative caregiver is not by itself a disqualifying factor in evaluating the placement of a child. Additionally, the act prohibits child welfare agencies from eliminating parental rights when a fit or willing parent or relative has been deported or detained. These actions will keep children out of the public child welfare system, which can cause additional stress and trauma, and instead ensure that separated families receive appropriate care and due process. No child should ever live in fear of being separated from their family. Given that approximately 5.1 million children under the age of 18 in the United States live with at least one undocumented parent—nearly 2 million of these children under the age of

¹ [Trump's 'zero tolerance' at the border is causing child shelters to fill up fast](#)

5—it is vital that Congress passes legislation that keeps children safe, secure, and in the care of loving family members.

The Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections (HELP) for Separated Children Act (H.R. 5950), would provide critical, nationwide protocols to protect the rights of vulnerable populations and address the unique needs of children during immigration enforcement procedures. In light of the recent increase in family separations, children of immigrants are at risk of finding themselves suddenly without their primary caregiver with no time for the parents to coordinate care for them. This bill allows parents to make arrangements for their child's care and allows for children to visit their parents while they are detained. Additionally, this bill requires U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to consider the best interests of the children in all detention, release, and transfer decisions affecting their parents.

The Fair Day in Court for Kids Act of 2018 (H.R. 2043) would ensure that children seeking protection in the United States are guaranteed legal counsel in their immigration proceedings. Additionally, this bill would provide that the Secretary of Homeland Security ensure that unaccompanied minors have access to counsel inside all immigration detention and border facilities. All migrant children placed into removal proceedings should be provided legal representation and child advocates to increase their chances for obtaining immigration relief and to ensure consideration of their best interests. It is crucial that children are not put through additional trauma, and instead are provided with services and supports to ensure the best outcome for them. No child should be forced to face a courtroom alone, especially when the outcome may be a matter of life or death.

As a nation that values the well-being of all children and understands the strength of family unity, it is our responsibility to ensure that children and families who are seeking refuge in the U.S. are not deterred from doing so and that our government provides the best protections and services to these vulnerable children during every step of the process. There is room for bipartisan conversations regarding our nation's broken immigration system. However, tearing children from their parents should never be a part of this conversation. This is not who we are as a nation, and Congress must denounce this cruel practice. Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you on this issue. Should you have any questions regarding this letter please contact Kristen Torres at kristent@firstfocus.org.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley
President