

September 22, 2020

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senate  
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

On behalf of First Focus Campaign for Children, a bipartisan children's advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families the priority in federal policy and budget decisions, we are writing to express our thanks and support for your introduction of S. 2389, the FAIR Proceedings Act.

For decades, too many children and families seeking protection in the United States have faced our complex immigration system without a guarantee of legal counsel. In 2017, over 75 percent of children were unrepresented in their immigration proceedings.<sup>1</sup> In 2016, 70 percent of families did not have an attorney when their cases closed.<sup>2</sup> Those in detention face even more barriers to accessing counsel.<sup>3</sup> For a child or parent, a denial of immigration relief could mean life or death.

We applaud you for introducing a bill to ensure that children and families know their rights and have support as they pursue safety and protection in the United States. By providing counsel for consolidated cases, this legislation recognizes that children are a part of their family and what happens in their parent's case affects their safety and well-being. Research shows that when individuals are appointed counsel, the efficiency of proceedings significantly improve and people are more likely to be granted a form of humanitarian relief.<sup>4</sup> Children and families who have endured significant trauma both in their home countries and during their journeys should not be without counsel during proceedings that could have life or death consequences.

Thank you again for your leadership on behalf of children and families. We look forward to working with you on this important legislation, which takes a critical step in meeting children's needs and protecting best interests.

Sincerely,



Bruce Lesley  
President

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<sup>1</sup> <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/482/>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.vera.org/downloads/publications/why-does-representation-matter.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>

[https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/detaining\\_families\\_a\\_study\\_of\\_asylum\\_adjudication\\_in\\_family\\_detention\\_final.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/detaining_families_a_study_of_asylum_adjudication_in_family_detention_final.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>

[https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/access\\_to\\_counsel\\_in\\_immigration\\_court.pdf](https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/access_to_counsel_in_immigration_court.pdf)