

July 24, 2018

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman, Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate HELP Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman, Senate HSGAC Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member, Senate HSGAC Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Vice Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators:

As medical and mental health providers for children and families, we have been deeply concerned as the federal government forcibly separated children from their parents. As the federal government attempts to comply with a federal court ruling ordering these families to be reunified, we watch with great concern as reports emerge about the mistreatment children and their parents face in federal custody. Many of our organizations have provided expert advice to the federal government about how to best care for and treat these families, but recent reports continue to raise troubling questions about the quality of care and treatment they are receiving. As such, we urge you to hold oversight hearings with the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Health and Human Services. As leaders of key congressional committees, we hope you will be able to get the comprehensive answers from these agencies that the public cannot.

Our organizations strongly oppose the separation of migrant children from their parents. Family separation can cause irreparable harm to children, and it is an act from which some families may never recover. In fact, courts have ruled the practice unconstitutional.

Prolonged detention of migrant children with their parents is not a solution to the forced separation of children from their parents at the U.S. border. Studies of detained immigrants have shown that children and parents may suffer negative physical and emotional symptoms from detention, including anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorderⁱ. Conditions in DHS facilities, which include open toilets, constant light exposure, insufficient food and water, no bathing facilities, extremely cold temperatures, and forcing children to sleep on cement floors, are traumatizing for children. These facilities are not appropriate places for children.

Most recently, two physicians within DHS's Office of Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, an office that has investigated DHS-run facilities and found serious compliance issues resulting in harm to children, stated in a letter to Congress that there is no amount of programming that can ameliorate the harms created by the very act of confining children to detention centers.ⁱⁱ The troubling observations described in the doctors' report show possible medical neglect and child endangerment and merit congressional inquiry and oversight.

We urge you to hold hearings to investigate the current situation facing migrant children and families as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American College of Physicians
American Medical Association
American Nurses Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychological Association
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Pediatric Policy Council
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Society for Pediatric Research

ⁱLinton JM, Griffin M, Shapiro AJ, AAP COUNCIL ON COMMUNITY PEDIATRICS. Detention of Immigrant Children. *Pediatrics*. 2017;139(5):e20170483.

ⁱⁱ<https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Doctors%20Congressional%20Disclosure%20SWC.pdf>