

Statewide Organizations Urge Idaho's Congressional Delegation to Take Immediate Action in Support of Immigrant Children and Their Families

June 28, 2018

Senator Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Congressman Raúl Labrador
1523 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Senate James Risch
483 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Congressman Mike Simpson
2084 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Crapo, Senator Risch, Congressman Labrador and Congressman Simpson:

We represent a network of Idaho organizations working together to advance the health, safety and well-being of children, families and communities. We are writing to share our concerns over the alarming maltreatment of immigrant children and their families.

In early May 2018, the Trump Administration began implementing a new and inhumane policy for individuals entering into the United States without authorization which has resulted in the separation of nearly 2,000 children from their parents. The practice of separating families and detaining children is indefensible and in direct conflict with the shared values of our organizations, communities and the State of Idaho.

We urge Idaho's congressional delegation to take action and lead efforts to (1) permanently end the practice of separating children from their parents, (2) immediately reunite families that have been separated and (3) discontinue the indefinite detention of immigrant children.

The practice of separating children from their parents will have significant and long-lasting consequences on the development and well-being of children. This type of highly stressful experience can disrupt the building of children's brain architecture. Prolonged exposure to serious stress – known as toxic stress – can lead to lifelong physical, social and emotional health problems.

Although President Trump signed an executive order to stop separating families in detention, these children and their families still have significant needs that must be met. Most significantly, the order offers no plan to reunite the thousands of children who remain disconnected from their parents. The continued separation from their parents will compound the trauma these children are experiencing.

Adverse childhood experiences increase a child's risk of both physical and mental illness. Forced separation disrupts the most important relationship in a child's life. The psychological distress associated with separation from a parent follows children well into the future. We are deeply concerned that recent agency actions have institutionalized harm to children as a matter of policy.

In addition, the executive order creates yet another crisis by authorizing the indefinite detention of children and their families. Children do not belong in prison, even with their parents, under any circumstances. Child welfare experts have long condemned the jailing of families, emphasizing the trauma and harms to children. There are many alternatives to jailing families, including providing access to counsel for their day in court. Releasing families is not only better for children, but it is a lot cheaper and just as safe for communities.

We can and must do better as a state and a country to protect the health, safety and well-being of all children and families. We ask that you support justice for immigrant children and lead efforts to permanently end family separations, reunify children with their parents and stop the indefinite detention of children.

Signed:

Idaho Voices for Children
Lauren Necochea, Director

Centro de Comunidad y Justicia
Sam Byrd, Director

ACLU of Idaho
Leo Morales, Executive Director

Advocates Against Family Violence, Inc.
Kimberly Deugan, Executive Director

**American Academy of Pediatrics
Idaho Chapter**
Sherry Iverson, Executive Director

**American Association of University
Women, Idaho**
Julie Custer and Kathy Scott, Co-Presidents

Andrade Legal, Immigration Law
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Anselme Sadiki, Executive Director

Empower Idaho
Katrina Hoff, Director

Idaho Academy of Family Physicians
Neva Santos, CAE, Executive Director

Idaho Association for the Education of Young Children
Beth Oppenheimer, Executive Director

Idaho Coalition Against Sexual & Domestic Violence
Kelly Miller, Executive Director

Idaho Community Action Network
Terri Sterling, Executive Director

Idaho Doctors and Nurses for Healthcare Coverage
Kathleen Romito, MD

Idaho Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Stephen Graci, Executive Director

Idaho Head Start Association
Bill Foxcroft, Executive Director

Idaho Hospital Association
Brian Whitlock, President/CEO

Idaho Hunger Relief Task Force
Kathy Gardner, Director

Idaho Medical Association
Susie Pouliot, Chief Executive Officer

Immigration Alliance of Idaho
Sarah Sentilles, Co-Founder

Interfaith Alliance of Idaho
Judy Cross, Board President

Jannus Economic Opportunity
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League of Women Voters
Susan Ripley, President

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Adrienne Evans, Executive Director