

March 16, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear President Biden and Secretary Mayorkas:

As medical and mental health clinicians and providers for children and families, we write to raise concerns about a harmful immigration policy that is reportedly under consideration, the reinstating of detention of immigrant families. As experts in medical and mental health care for children and families, we know that family detention puts the health and safety of children and their parents at risk and, as such, we urge you to abandon any effort to detain families in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities.

Immigrant children seeking safe haven in the United States should never be placed in ICE detention facilities. There is no evidence that any amount of time in detention is safe for children and detention itself poses a threat to child health.<sup>i,ii</sup> In fact, even short periods of detention can cause psychological trauma and long-term mental health risks.<sup>iii</sup> 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 disorder.<sup>iv,v</sup> Parents in detention centers have described regressive behavioral changes in their children, including decreased eating, sleep disturbances, clinginess, withdrawal, self-injurious behavior, and aggression.<sup>vi</sup> Detention itself undermines parental authority and the capacity to respond to their children's needs.<sup>vii</sup> Further, family detention facilities have historically been unable to provide medical and mental health care that meets generally recognized standards.

DHS's immigration enforcement practices should operationalize the presumption that detention is generally neither appropriate nor necessary for families—and that detention or the separation of families for purposes of immigration enforcement or management are never in the best interest of children. Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We stand ready to work with you to ensure the health and safety of immigrant families is safeguarded.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association  
American Academy of Family Physicians  
American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry  
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
American College of Physicians  
American Medical Association  
American Pediatric Society

Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs  
Catholic Health Association of the United States  
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners  
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine

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<sup>i</sup> Linton JM, Griffin M, Shapiro AJ. Detention of Immigrant Children. *Pediatrics*. 2017;139(5).

<sup>ii</sup> <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0282798>

<sup>iii</sup> Linton JM, Griffin M, Shapiro AJ. Detention of Immigrant Children. *Pediatrics*. 2017;139(5).

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid.

<sup>v</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332732097\\_Mental\\_health\\_of\\_children\\_held\\_at\\_a\\_United\\_States\\_immigration\\_detention\\_center](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332732097_Mental_health_of_children_held_at_a_United_States_immigration_detention_center)

<sup>vi</sup> Linton JM, Griffin M, Shapiro AJ. Detention of Immigrant Children. *Pediatrics*. 2017;139(5).

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid.