

July 23, 2012

RE: Support for the Help Separated Families Act of 2012

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned organizations, urge you to support the Help Separated Families Act, legislation introduced by Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA-34). The bill aims to improve the likelihood that children placed in the child welfare system as a result of immigration enforcement actions against their parents can ultimately reunify with their parents.

The statistics clearly demonstrate that immigration enforcement activities are tearing families apart, sometimes permanently. In the first six months of 2011, the Department of Homeland Security reported that more than 46,000 parents of U.S. citizen children had been removed from the United States. Another report issued by the Applied Research Center revealed that approximately 5,100 children are currently in the child welfare system due to a parent's detention or removal.

When a child enters the child welfare system, reunification efforts are often complicated by disconnects between the immigration system and state child welfare systems. It is considered a child welfare best practice to place children separated from their parents with other family members, yet many child welfare agencies refuse to place children with otherwise qualified relative caregivers just because they are undocumented. In addition, parents who are detained or removed by immigration authorities are often unable to participate in family court hearings or meet case plan requirements, sometimes resulting in the inappropriate termination of their parental rights.

Congresswoman Roybal-Allard's Help Separated Families Act addresses several barriers to reunification. The bill prohibits immigration status alone from being a factor in child placement determinations. It also clarifies that certain forms of foreign identification are sufficient for purposes of a background check. The bill also ensures that questions about caregivers' immigration status are limited to purposes of eligibility for relevant programs or services and allows for waivers of certain requirements that would prevent the placement of a child with a relative due to a minor legal infraction. Finally, the bill prevents child welfare agencies from filing for termination of parental rights in cases where a parent's involvement in immigration proceedings is the main reason a child is in foster care, unless certain conditions are met.

These procedures are critical to ensuring that children who are separated from their parents as a result of immigration enforcement measures are not permanently and unnecessarily torn apart from their parents or other family members. We therefore urge you to support the Help Separated

Families Act and ensure that child welfare practice upholds the principles of child well-being and family unity.

Sincerely,

NATIONAL

Advocates for Human Rights

American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)

American Friends Service Committee

Asian American Justice Center, member of the Asian American Center for Advancing Justice Breakthrough

Center for Gender and Refugee Studies

Church World Service, Immigration and Refugee Program

Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption

DREAMActivist.org

The Episcopal Church

Film, Inquiry, Research, Medium, Education (FIRME)

First Focus Campaign for Children

Foster Care to Success Foundation

Foster Family-Based Treatment Association

Franciscan Action Network

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

Immigration Equality

Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)

International Social Service - United States of America Branch, Inc.

International Union (UAW)

Jesuit Social Research Institute, Loyola University of New Orleans

Jubilee Campaign USA

Kids In Need of Defense (KIND)

Little Sisters of the Assumption, U.S. Province

Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

MomsRising

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Alliance for Immigration Reform

National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

National Association of Social Workers

National Council of La Raza
National Crittenton Foundation
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National Immigrant Youth Alliance
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Latino Children's Institute
NETWORK
OneAmerica
Post-Deportation Human Rights Project, Boston College
Rebecca Project
Rights Working Group
Salvadoran American National Network
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
Sojourners
South Asian Americans Leading Together
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)
United We Dream Network
Voices for America's Children
Women's Refugee Commission
The Young Center for Immigrant and Children's Rights, University of Chicago
Youth Law Center

LOCAL AND STATE ORGANIZATIONS

Alaska

Alaska Literacy Program

Arizona

Children's Action Alliance
Coalición de Derechos Humanos
The Florence Project
Restoration Project at Casa Mariposa
Southern Arizona Center Against Sexual Assault, a member agency of Arizona's Children Association

Arkansas

Arkansas Advocates for Children

California

The Bridging Group

California Immigrant Policy Center

Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice - LA

Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice - Santa Barbara

Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles

Community Works West

DREAM Activist California

Immigrant Youth Coalition

Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Coalition

John Burton Foundation

Los Angeles Immigrant Youth Coalition

National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter

Public Council Law Center

San Gabriel Valley Immigrant Youth Coalition

Silicon Valley Alliance for Immigration Reform

Colorado

Colorado, Organize, Resist, Escalate

Servicios de la Raza

District of Columbia

DREAM Activist DC

Georgia

Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights

Georgia Rural Urban Summit

Georgia Undocumented Youth Alliance

Florida

Americans for Immigrant Justice

DREAM Activist Florida

Idaho

Alliance for a Just Society, Idaho Community Action Network

Illinois

Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM)
Immigrant Youth Justice League

Indiana

Indiana DREAM Initiative

Iowa

Iowa Justice For Our Neighbors
Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ames

Kansas

Kansas/Missouri Dream Alliance

Kentucky

Kentucky Undocumented Youth Alliance

Louisiana

DREAM Activist Louisiana
Law Clinic and Center for Social Justice, Loyola University New Orleans College of Law

Maine

Maine Children's Alliance

Maryland

Advocates for Children and Youth

Michigan

One Michigan
Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights

Nebraska

Nebraska Families Collaborative

New Jersey

Casa de Esperanza
Reformed Church of Highland Park
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Who Is My Neighbor? Inc.

New Mexico

New Mexico Voices for Children
Pegasus Legal Services for Children
Women's Intercultural Center

New York

New Sanctuary Coalition of NYC
New York State Youth Leadership Council
Osborne Association

North Carolina

Action for Children North Carolina
North Carolina DREAM Team
North Carolina Immigrant Rights Project

Ohio

DREAM Activist Ohio
Voices of Ohio's Children

Oregon

Oregon DREAM Activist

Pennsylvania

DREAM Activist Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Council of Churches

South Carolina

South Carolina Appleseed Legal Justice Center

Texas

Center for Public Policy Priorities
Dominican Sisters of Houston
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Hutto Visitation Program
Texans Care for Children
Texas Jail Project
Texans United for Families
Welcoming Immigrants Network (WIN)

Utah

Voices for Utah Children

Virginia

DREAM Activist Virginia

Washington

Children's Alliance

Northwest Immigrant Rights Project

Partners for our Children

Wisconsin

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families