

June 12, 2018

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Attorney General Sessions and Secretary Nielsen,

On behalf of the 26 undersigned national Jewish organizations and institutions, we write to express our strong opposition to the recently expanded “zero-tolerance” policy that includes separating children from their migrant parents when they cross the border. This policy undermines the values of our nation and jeopardizes the safety and well-being of thousands of people.

As Jews, we understand the plight of being an immigrant fleeing violence and oppression. We believe that the United States is a nation of immigrants and how we treat the stranger reflects on the moral values and ideals of this nation.

Many of these migrant families are seeking asylum in the United States to escape violence in Central America. Taking children away from their families is unconscionable. Such practices inflict unnecessary trauma on parents and children, many of whom have already suffered traumatic experiences. This added trauma negatively impacts physical and mental health, including increasing the risk of early death.¹

Separating families is a cruel punishment for children and families simply seeking a better life and exacerbates existing challenges in our immigration system. It adds to the backlog of deportation cases and legal challenges in federal courts, places thousands more immigrants in detention facilities and shelters, endangers the lives of more children, and instills additional fear in people seeking safety in our country. In addition, those seeking asylum or other legal protection face numerous obstacles to making a claim, especially from detention. Separating family members at the border would force families into two or more immigration cases instead of a single case for each family, harming their ability to present a successful case.

Our Jewish faith demands of us concern for the stranger in our midst. Our own people’s history as “strangers” reminds us of the many struggles faced by immigrants today and compels our commitment to an immigration system in this country that is compassionate and just. We urge

¹ Michael MacKenzie, Emily Bosk, and Charles Zeanah, “Separation Families at the Border- Consequences for Children’s Health and Well-Being,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, June 15, 2017, *available at* <https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMp1703375>.

you to immediately rescind the “zero tolerance” policy and uphold the values of family unity and justice on which our nation was built.

Sincerely,

American Conference of Cantors
American Jewish Committee (AJC)
American Jewish World Service
Anti-Defamation League
B’nai B’rith International
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Central Conference of American Rabbis
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
HIAS
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Labor Committee
Jewish Women International
Men of Reform Judaism
National Association of Jewish Legislators
National Council of Jewish Women
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies
NFTY – The Reform Jewish Youth Movement
Rabbinical Assembly
Reconstructing Judaism
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
The Workmen's Circle
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Union for Reform Judaism
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Uri L'Tzedek, The Orthodox Social Justice Movement
Women of Reform Judaism