

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 31, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Secretary Nielsen and Attorney General Sessions,

We are deeply concerned with recent policy changes made by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ), which has resulted in the separation of children from their families. We call on DHS and DOJ to immediately cease these practices.

Additionally, we fear that the anti-immigrant climate created by your Departments' policies is undermining the efforts of other federal agencies to engage meaningfully with immigrants, in particular unaccompanied minors and their sponsoring families, and other vulnerable children. Recent reports that the Office of Refugee Resettlement has been unable to make contact with the sponsors of nearly 1,500 unaccompanied minors is a clear indication that your agencies' policies are putting immigrant children in harm's way by driving people away from resources that could help them.

Americans across the nation are horrified by actions undertaken to separate and therefore punish children and families seeking safety and refuge in the United States. This practice is antithetical not only to American values but to basic decency and humanity. It's no secret why many seeking refuge are coming from countries in Central America -- many nations in the region are undergoing significant challenges and problems with violence, corruption, and threats by dangerous gangs. We should be doing more to address the root causes of these problems so that people don't feel compelled to flee in the first place.

But in the meantime, harming children – and separating children from their families is harmful – should not be used to deter others from seeking safety, nor should our institutions be the source of further hardship given the situation that these innocent children are fleeing. But sadly, the White House has made clear that it is separating children from families in order to create a deterrent to others seeking safety. Chief of Staff John Kelly said in early May that taking children would be "a tough deterrent."

This is entirely unnecessary. In only one recent example, agents ripped an 18-month-old toddler away from his mother who fled to the United States seeking asylum. That is hardly how the United States should treat children – unnecessarily inflicting trauma. And it is a testament to the dire situation in Central America that these young people continue to arrive in spite of the supposed “deterrents” that DHS and DOJ have employed.

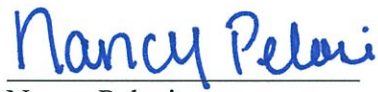
It doesn't have to be this way. Children who arrive in the United States as unaccompanied minors should be treated with the utmost compassion, as our nation has done for many years. Your departments must employ patience and diligence in addressing the complex issues that cause children to flee their home for safety in the United States. Indiscriminate, heavy-handed punishment of children will only evoke further problems for government agencies to address, such as those reported recently.

We strongly urge you to change course. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



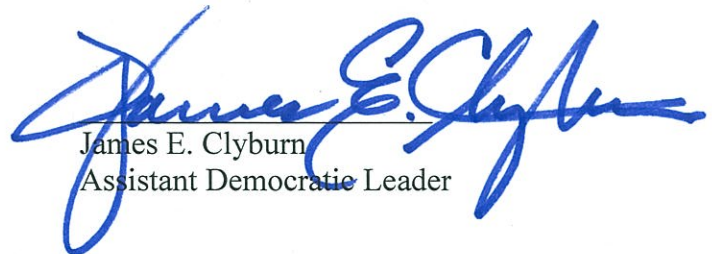
Joseph Crowley
Chairman, House Democratic Caucus



Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader



Steny H. Hoyer
Democratic Whip



James E. Clyburn
Assistant Democratic Leader



Linda T. Sánchez
Vice Chair, House Democratic Caucus