

Mr. Matthew Albence
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20536

July 7, 2020

Dear Acting Director Albence,

We, the undersigned children's rights organizations, write to request that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) release all children - together with their families - from the Karnes Family Residential Center, the South Texas Family Residential Center in Dilley, and the Berks Family Residential Center.

We are aware that on June 26, a federal judge ordered ICE to release children being held in family detention facilities by July 17. In the order, Judge Dolly M. Gee cites the rising number of coronavirus cases in these detention centers as evidence that ICE facilities are not yet implementing the best public health practices during the pandemic. Under the Flores Settlement Agreement, which Judge Gee oversees, children are guaranteed a standard of protection and care. Although the June 26 order only requires you to release the children held in these detention facilities, we request that you also authorize the release of the parents and caregivers of these children in order to avoid further harming these children and their families.

Our organizations are deeply familiar with the devastating effects of family separation from our work with children and families separated during and after the administration's Zero-Tolerance policy. Separations undermine family stability, and lead to toxic stress, trauma, and developmental regression in children.¹ Even a temporary separation can have a negative impact on the health and educational attainment of children later in life, and many parents struggle to restore the parent-child bond once it has been disrupted by a separation.² According to the American College of Physicians, family separation has been shown to cause significant and long-term damage to a child's social, emotional and intellectual development and well-being.³

¹ Caitlin Dickerson & Manny Fernandez, *What's Behind the 'Tender Age' Shelters Opening for Young Migrants*, N.Y. TIMES (June 20, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/us/tender-age-shelters-family-separation-immigration.html> (quoting Young Center Associate Director Elizabeth Frankel); see also *All Things Considered: How the Trump Administration's Family Separation Policy is Playing Out* (NPR radio broadcast, May 28, 2018) (interviewing Young Center Policy Director Jennifer Nagda).

² Laura C. N. Wood, *Impact of Punitive Immigration Policies, Parent-Child Separation and Child Detention on the Mental Health and Development of Children*, 2 BMJ PAEDIATRICS OPEN 1, 3 (2018), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6173255/>.

³ The Health Impact of Family Detentions in Immigration Cases (July 3, 2018) https://www.acponline.org/acp_policy/policies/family_detention_position_statement_2018.pdf

Based on this and other related evidence associated with the trauma brought on by such separations, we feel that the health and development of children would be unnecessarily jeopardized if ICE does not exercise its discretion to release affected children and families together. Additionally, there are alternatives to detention that have proven effective in protecting children while ensuring due process. Therefore, in order to avoid family separations – and their ensuing detrimental effects on children – we urge you to release these children together with their families.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Save the Children Action Network (SCAN)

UNICEF USA

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights