July 23, 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, Escalte
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
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