

June 20, 2018

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

The Honorable Alex Azar
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Department of Homeland Security
300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Attorney General Sessions, Secretary Azar, and Secretary Nielsen:

On behalf of the undersigned mental health-related organizations, we write to urge the administration to immediately cease enforcement of policies that result in the separation of children from their parents at the United States border. Children are dependent on their parents for safety and support. Any forced separation is highly stressful for children and can cause lifelong trauma, as well as an increased risk of other mental illnesses, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition, the longer that children and parents are separated, the greater the reported symptoms of anxiety and depression for the children.

An act of Congress is not necessary to halt this cruel policy. This is not an acceptable policy to counter unlawful immigration, and the administration must immediately rescind this course of action. We support practical, humane immigration policies that take into account what we know about the harmful, long-term psychological effects of separation on children and their families.

Sincerely,

American Art Therapy Association
American Association of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry
American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry
American Group Psychotherapy Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychiatric Association
American Psychoanalytic Association
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law

Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice
Council on Social Work Education
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors
National Association for Rural Mental Health
National Disability Rights Network
National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Register of Health Service Psychologists