

July 23, 2012

RE: Support for the Help Separated Families Act of 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

Americans for Immigrant Justice

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 Church U.S.A

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 Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society  
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, Escalate

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**

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  
Who Is My Neighbor? Inc.

**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  
Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

**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