



**FIRST FOCUS CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD**

**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY HEARING
“KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER:
THE PRESIDENT’S EXECUTIVE ACTION ON IMMIGRATION AND THE NEED TO PASS
COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM”**

DECEMBER 10, 2014

Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Grassley, and Members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, we thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record for the hearing on the recently announced executive immigration accountability actions and the need to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

The First Focus Campaign for Children (FFCC) is a bipartisan advocacy organization dedicated to making children and families a priority in federal policy and budget decisions. As an organization dedicated to promoting the safety and well-being of all children in the United States, we have been advocating on behalf of the passage of comprehensive immigration reform which addresses the unique needs of children, including U.S. citizen and lawfully present children in immigrant families, undocumented youth, and unaccompanied migrant children. In 2013, we developed a set of [children’s principles for immigration reform](#), endorsed by over 200 national and state organizations, calling for immigration reform to: 1.) provide a path to citizenship for parents and youth; 2.) protect children’s fundamental rights; 3.) ensure that enforcement actions do not cause children harm; and 4.) keep families together.

In addition to advocating for legislative change, FFCC has also been advocating for administrative reforms to mitigate the harmful impact of immigration enforcement actions on children. In recent years, the FFCC has been instrumental in pushing for more humane approaches to immigration enforcement, including the 2013 Immigration and Customs Enforcement “parental interest directive,” which helps ensure that detained and deported parents are able to make critical decisions regarding their child’s care and participate in the child welfare system process when necessary. We have also been calling for the halt of parental deportations, and therefore we strongly support the President’s new executive immigration accountability actions as we firmly believe that they will provide immigrant families with much needed relief. Every day that Congress has waited to pass immigration reform has meant one more day of families being needlessly torn apart and millions of children living in fear. Currently, more than 5 million children in the U.S. live in a mixed-status family with at least one undocumented parent, and the high rates of parental deportations in recent years has directly impacted the health and well-being of our nation’s children. In fact, recent analysis by Human Impact Partners reveals that more than 150,000 U.S. citizen children lost a parent to deportation in 2013 alone.

This past week the FFCC released an analysis entitled [*A Step Forward: Immigration Executive Actions and Our Nation's Children*](#). The analysis highlights the impact of key provisions on the family unity and child well-being. We applaud the fact that more than 300,000 more youth will now be eligible for the expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, a program which has already provided more than half a million young people with improved access to higher education, career opportunities, and basic necessities such as a driver's license or credit card.

We also strongly support the introduction of the new Deferred Action for Parental Accountability (DAPA) program, a program which has the potential to provide protection from deportation and access to work authorization for up to 4.1 million parents of U.S. citizens and lawfully permanent residents (LPRs). Up to 4.5 million children, nearly 7 percent of the U.S. K-12 student population, will no longer have to live in fear of losing a parent to deportation. The parents who qualify for the new Deferred Action for Parental Accountability Program will also be able to apply for work permits, enabling them to secure more stable employment and critical income supports. By strengthening parents, the program will enable them to better meet their children's basic needs. And that means children will be healthier and do better in school, which is a win for the nation as a whole.

Ultimately, the new executive immigration accountability actions represent a promising step in the right direction for millions of children who have fallen victim to the enforcement-heavy immigration policies of recent years. Given that children of immigrants comprise one quarter of the U.S. child population it is imperative that immigration policies promote their best interests. These new reforms have the potential to significantly improve not only lives of the children and families directly affected, but also the country as whole. However, we also recognize that they are incomplete and insufficient. Half of the U.S. undocumented population will remain vulnerable, including parents of DREAMERS, children too young to apply for DACA, parents who have already been deported, and parents of U.S. citizens who have been here less than 5 years. Thus, the only permanent solution remains for Congress to pass immigration reform legislation that includes a path to citizenship.

We thank you again for the opportunity to submit this written testimony. We look forward to working with Members on both sides of the aisle to continue to push for immigration reform. Should there be any questions regarding this statement, please contact Wendy Cervantes, Vice President of Immigration and Child Rights, at 202-657-0637 or wendyc@firstfocus.net.