

June 19, 2018

Public Statement against Family Separation by United States Government

The National Association of Deans and Directors of Social Work Programs (NADD) is deeply concerned, outraged, and opposed to the May 7, 2018 “zero tolerance” immigration policy that has seized and separated over 2000 children from their asylum-seeking families. We join the National Association of Social Workers, the Council on Social Work Education, the United Nations, and countless professional and advocacy groups in condemning this practice, calling for the immediate reunification of detained immigrant children and their parents, and demanding an end to this draconian policy.

NADD represents over 200 graduate social work education programs throughout the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Grounded in our Code of Ethics and its values of social justice and the importance of human relationships, a significant hallmark of the social work profession is its mission of service to all members of our community, particularly its most vulnerable children, and families. As mental health professionals and human rights advocates and researchers, we are acutely aware of the grave harm caused by separating children from their parents except in cases of imminent danger. The forcible separation of children from their families is unethical and abhorrent. It is un-American to force children who have done nothing wrong to suffer.

Since the implementation of this deterrent “zero tolerance” policy, children have been separated from their families, often by hundreds of miles, and are housed in inadequate facilities without the nurturing and care they so desperately need. The often life-long health and mental health consequences of traumatic parent-child separation have been established by decades of child welfare research, led by some of the nation’s top social work scholars and health scientists and funded by Federal agencies such as NIH. These painful family separations, the sensory deprivation experienced in detention centers, and the terrifying uncertainty for the future can result in post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues as well as sometimes irreversible biological and neurodevelopmental problems.

As noted by Juvonen and Silvers (Washington Post, May 15, 2018), it also violates international law. It is, by definition, torture. Under federal law, torture is “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental is intentionally inflicted for such purposes as...punishing him or her for an act he or she or a third person ...has committed.” Inflicting mental suffering on children to punish their parents, deter future immigrants, and leverage political action is a form of torture.

We call on Congress and the President to rescind this horrific policy. We also call on all social workers to add their voices to ours and write to their representatives asking that this policy end immediately. Also, we encourage all social workers to help address this humanitarian crisis by volunteering and/or donating to support advocacy and service for asylum-seeking immigrant children and families. Some **resources for action** include:

<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/06/how-you-can-fight-family-separation-at-the-border.html>

<http://caraprobano.org/volunteer/>

There is no ethical reason to separate asylum-seeking parents from their children. It is inhumane to use children as political leverage or hostages to a political agenda. We must work together to find an immediate solution to this destructive practice. We are better than this.



Martell Teasley, Ph.D., MSW
President, NADD

*This statement is the majority consensus of the membership and may not reflect the views of all programs in the organization.