



Statement From Irwin Garfinkel on "Zero Tolerance" Immigration Policy

Dear CSSW Community,

In recent weeks, we have witnessed the dire consequences of the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy. Social workers are acutely aware of the harm done to children when they are separated from their parents. The [scientific evidence](#) of the ill effects of separation is overwhelming, which is why social workers make every effort to keep children with their parents whenever possible.

It is immoral to separate children from their parents in order to send a message, whether to Congress or to other potential asylum seekers. To do so treats children as pawns. Yesterday, in response to widespread condemnation from social workers, pediatricians, psychologists, religious leaders, and elected officials across the country, President Trump signed an executive order halting, at least temporarily, this odious practice.

At this point we don't know whether the administration will re-unite the families it has torn apart, whether it will address the trauma it has inflicted on these people, how it will reconcile "zero tolerance" with keeping families intact, or how it plans to detain immigrants indefinitely while respecting their human rights. We do know that the Trump Administration is using racist and xenophobic appeals to fuel anti-immigrant sentiment and build support to restrict immigration. As social workers, we must steer the conversation away from these

bigoted appeals towards an evidence-based discussion of immigration policy. The recent [National Academy of Science study of immigration](#) is a good place to start.

In the past few days, I've found hope in the advocacy of social workers. The NASW wrote a [letter of opposition](#) to these policies three weeks ago, and last week, University of Houston Dean Alan Dettlaff circulated a letter he wrote to his school among the National Association of Deans and Directors (NADD). His letter stimulated Social Work Deans and directors all over the country to support a NADD open letter decrying the administration's policy. This outpouring of support provides a small source of hope in these troubling times. Many people are speaking out for justice, and their voices should encourage all of us to take a stand.

At the Columbia School of Social Work, we honor evidence and human rights and take action against injustice. I encourage you to raise your voice however you are able: whether by marching in solidarity on June 30th, calling your representatives, putting pen to paper, donating to organizations providing direct services, or reaching out to those who are directly affected by the Trump administration immigration policy. These actions, however small, can make a difference for our neighbors and change the direction of our society.

Sincerely,

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