

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

May __, 2015

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We appreciate that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) acknowledged in its recent announcement that the family detention system is in need of oversight and accountability. However, we believe the announced reforms do not go far enough. As many of us expressed to you in a letter last October, the prolonged detention of asylum-seeking mothers and children who pose no flight risk or danger to the community is unacceptable and goes against our most fundamental values.

Most of these families have come seeking refuge from three of the most dangerous countries in the world, countries where women and girls face shocking rates of domestic and sexual violence and murder. Treating these victims like criminals is wrong. The latest data from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service Asylum Division confirm the misguided nature of this detention policy, showing that 88% of the families detained across the government's three family detention facilities have been found to have legitimate refugee claims by establishing a credible fear of persecution if returned to their home countries.

While these mothers and children wait their turn before an immigration judge, there are many alternatives to detention that are more humane, cost-efficient, and will keep families together. We are deeply concerned by the growing evidence that detention of young children, particularly those who have experienced significant trauma, is detrimental to their development and physical and mental health. That evidence has been reinforced by specific examples of individual children in these detention facilities struggling to eat or sleep, and exhibiting signs of serious depression.

We appreciate all that you have done to improve conditions at family detention facilities, however we do not believe there is any system of mass family detention that will work or is consistent with our moral values and historic commitment to provide safe and humane refuge to those fleeing persecution. We urge you to end the practice of presumptive detention of families and return to the policy of utilizing detention only as a last resort, when there is a serious public safety or flight risk that cannot be mitigated by alternatives to detention.

Sincerely,