

AAP: Homeland Security proposal to separate migrant families ‘un-American’

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Calling the separation of migrant families arriving at the U.S. border “fundamentally un-American and cruel,” the Academy and 183 other organizations issued a joint letter (<http://bit.ly/2n8x7D9>) Wednesday to Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary John F. Kelly opposing the proposal.

“Family separation will only further traumatize those already fleeing harm, and will inhibit their ability to access a legal process to which they have a right under U.S. and international law,” the letter said.

“Secretary Kelly, we urge you and the Administration not to implement a policy of separating migrant families.”

Similar policies of detaining asylum-seeking families to deter their migration have been found by a U.S. court to violate U.S. law, the letter points out.

Children seeking refuge in the United States endure emotional and physical stress. They should not be separated from families but instead should be treated with dignity and respect, according to the recently released AAP policy *Detention of Immigrant Children* (<http://bit.ly/2nEuxDZ>).

Separation from parents, siblings and other relatives and caregivers not only would exacerbate the children’s health problems but would overwhelm the system and cause a crisis in care, according to the letter.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) does not have the mechanisms to ensure coordinated communications between separated family members to pursue their case together. The family member who would retain documents to help support the asylum claim would be separated from the rest of the family, the letter noted.

ORR also would face budget burdens of at least \$300 million annually, in addition to added costs and burdens to provide resources to care for young, unaccompanied children.

DHS has proposed that separating migrant families would deter families from making the journey and protect those seeking safety from dangerous networks at the southern border.

However, “separating families may actually exacerbate the vulnerability to smugglers and traffickers they already face,” according to the letter’s signatories, which include national, state and local groups representing those working on behalf of immigrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and children.

“This policy will not prevent mothers from fleeing harm to bring their children to safety and may in fact make them even more vulnerable on an already dangerous journey. We urge you to reverse course on any policy

proposal that would seek to tear apart families or otherwise inflict trauma and harm.”

Resources

- [AAP Immigrant Child Health toolkit](#)
- [AAP Voices blog Children Should be Cared for, Not Caged](#)

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