

*VIA Email Delivery Only*

March 15, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
NW Washington, D.C. 20500

**Re: Permanently end family detention**

Dear President Biden:

The undersigned 383 organizations write to express our grave concern over reports that your administration is considering returning to the policy of family detention which has subjected hundreds of families to abusive, inhumane, and racially discriminatory practices. The long dark history of detaining families in Immigration and Custody Enforcement (ICE) facilities provides all the evidence necessary to show the U.S. government should never return to this inhumane practice. Directly impacted families, advocates, attorneys, whistleblowers, and medical and other experts have condemned this practice for years and fought to close down the facilities used to detain families. Your administration took the important and widely lauded step of ending the detention of families in ICE detention in late 2021. Reinstating a policy of detaining families in ICE or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody, even for short periods of time, would be a horrifying reversal of your past policies and commitments.

No version of family detention, whether referred to as a detention facility, short-term processing center, emergency family staging center, or by any other name, is acceptable. We call on you to stand by your commitment as President, to turn the page from the horrors of prior administrations and pursue humane policies that do not involve incarcerating families. The well-documented inherent problems with family detention leave no room for doubt that re-starting this policy in any form will inflict suffering on children and their parents—and should never again be considered a viable government policy. In fact, the detention of immigrant children, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, is prohibited in international law as it is not in their best interests.

Immigration detention, regardless of the duration of detention or the type of facility used, inflicts irreversible trauma, especially on children. Medical experts agree that detention is harmful and causes toxic stress that can be life-long for children, *regardless of the duration of stay*. Numerous professional medical associations, including the [American](#)

[Academy of Pediatrics](#), have documented the harm it causes both children and their parents, including potentially life long neurological damage to children such as post-traumatic stress disorder, emotional and mental health issues, including depression and anxiety, and weight loss among other physical, emotional and behavioral health problems. DHS's own medical experts who served as whistleblowers to document their alarm about the harm caused to children by family detention stated clearly in their [2021 disclosure to Congress](#) that "any amount of detention can be harmful to children." Regardless of whether it's called "processing" or "short-term detention," confining families is unacceptable.

Like all ICE detention, family detention centers have a well-documented history of [abusive conditions](#), including inadequate [medical](#) and [mental health care](#), lack of access to water and other necessities, and inappropriate disciplinary tactics including threats to separate families. In 2001, ICE opened the first family detention center, the [Berks Family Residential Center](#) and later began detaining families at the notorious [T. Don Hutto Detention Center](#). In spite of documented abuses, widespread opposition and [warnings](#) at these facilities, the Obama administration opened three additional facilities in 2014, the [South Texas Family Residential Center](#), the [Karnes County Residential Center](#), and the [Artesia Family Residential Center](#), which it was forced to close in the same year due to [abusive conditions](#). An advisory committee convened by DHS itself [determined in 2016](#) that family detention was neither appropriate nor necessary. Still, the Obama administration continued to [send](#) families to [detention](#), with long-term ramifications that resonate today.

Because of the nature of confinement, families have [limited access to counsel](#) at these facilities, making it nearly impossible to pursue protection claims under U.S. immigration law. These due process and access to counsel concerns will be magnified if the administration's recently promulgated [asylum ban](#) rule goes into effect, heightening the evidentiary standard for families to access the ability to seek protection.

Family detention became a core aspect of the Trump administration's [cruel](#) and punitive approach to immigration. During your campaign in 2020, you [said](#) that families should not be detained in ICE detention. Your campaign [pledged](#) to end prolonged detention. In a welcome move, your administration stopped using the three facilities that were being used at the time for family detention.

We call on you to not lock up immigrant families. We are also gravely concerned that DHS will attempt to push families through the new expedited removal process laid out in the recently proposed [asylum ban rule](#) during their 20 days in family detention. We urge you to reverse course on the proposed asylum ban rule, and are horrified that the

punitive policy could be coupled with family detention. This will essentially mean that these facilities will become deportation factories as families scramble to defend their asylum eligibility while trying to protect their children from the agony of detention. There are alternative solutions for managing migration at the border that do not require detaining families and removing them so quickly as to undermine their meaningful opportunity to seek asylum or other legal relief.

At the beginning of your administration, you pledged to end family detention and to pursue just, compassionate, and humane immigration policies. We are deeply troubled that you are now considering restarting policies that have proven to be cruel, inhumane, and racially discriminatory. Pursuing this path will exact terrible and lasting trauma on children and families that will become the legacy of your administration. We urge you not to return to this practice and to take steps to end the use of immigration detention altogether.

**Sincerely,**

American Civil Liberties Union  
American Immigration Council  
Amnesty International USA  
Black Alliance for Just Immigration  
Detention Watch Network  
Freedom for Immigration  
Human Rights First  
Immigrant Legal Resource Center  
National Immigrant Justice Center  
National Immigration Project (NIPNLG)  
18 Million Rising  
Abortion Access Front  
Acacia Center for Justice  
Advocates for Basic Legal Equality  
Afghans For A Better Tomorrow  
African Communities Together (ACT)  
African Immigration Initiative of the courageous Resistance  
Al Otro Lado  
Aldea - The People's Justice Center  
Alianza Sacramento  
All-Options  
Alliance for Quality Education  
America's Voice

American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)  
American Gateways  
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)  
Americans for Immigrant Justice  
Arizona Asian American Native Hawaiian Pacific Islanders for Equity  
Arizona Justice for Our Neighbors  
Asian American Advocacy Fund  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Asian Law Caucus  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC  
Asian Pacific Community in Action  
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence  
Asian Prisoner Support Committee  
ASISTA Immigration Assistance  
Asylum Seeker Advocacy Project (ASAP)  
AVAN Immigrant Services  
Ayuda  
Bay Area Professional Family Child Care Network  
Bend The Arc  
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action  
Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore  
Berks Stands Up  
Bethany House of Hospitality  
Birth In Color RVA  
Black Women for Wellness  
Black Women for Wellness Action Project  
Border Kindness  
Border Workers United  
Boston University Immigrants' Rights and Human Trafficking Program  
Bridges Faith Initiative  
Buen Vecino  
California Coalition For Women Prisoners  
California Immigrant Policy Center  
Caravan for the Children  
Caring Across Generations  
Carolina Migrant Network  
CASA  
Casa Freehold  
Casa Mariposa Detention Visitation Program  
Catholics for Choice

Center for Gender & Refugee Studies  
Center for Immigration Law and Policy at UCLA School of Law  
Center for Law and Social Policy  
Center for the Study of Social Policy  
Center for Victims of Torture  
Central American Minors (CAM) Working Group  
Central American Resource Center of Northern CA  
Centro de Trabajadores Unidos: United Workers Center  
Centro Legal de la Raza  
CGI Srs. Of St. Dominic Caldwell, N.J.  
Chicana Latina Foundation  
Child Labor Coalition  
CHILDREN AT RISK  
Children's HealthWatch  
Children's Rights  
Chula Vista Partners in Courage  
Church World Service  
Civil Rights Education and Enforcement Center  
Coalición de Derechos Humanos  
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)  
Coalition of Latino Leaders-CLILA-  
Collective Power for Reproductive Justice  
Colorado Children's Campaign  
Columbia Law School Immigrants' Rights Clinic  
Communities United for Status & Protection (CUSP)  
Community Asylum Seekers Project  
Community Change Action  
Community EsTr(EI/La)  
Community for Children  
Community Justice Exchange  
Community Organizing and Family Issues  
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces  
Conversations with Friends  
Cooperative Baptist Fellowship  
Cornell Asylum and Convention Against Torture Appeals Clinic  
CSUCI  
Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services, Inc.  
DIRE  
Disability Rights Advocates  
Dolores Street Community Services

Dominican Sisters ~ Grand Rapids  
Drsm  
Drug Policy Alliance  
El Calvario Immigrant Advocacy Center  
El Refugio  
End Rape On Campus  
ERA Coalition  
Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project  
Faith in New Jersey  
Faith In New Jersey  
Faithful Friends/Amigos fieles  
Families For Freedom  
Family Values@Work Action  
Fellowship Southwest  
Fight for the Future  
FIRM Action  
First Focus on Children  
First Friends of NJ & NY  
FL National Organization for Women  
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project  
Florida Immigrant Coalition  
Foreign Policy for America  
Free Migration Project  
Free Them All SD Coalition  
Freedom Network USA  
Freedom University  
Futures Without Violence  
GALEO Impact Fund  
Galería de la Raza  
Georgia Detention Watch  
Global Justice Center  
Government Accountability Project  
Grandmothers for Reproductive Rights (GRR!)  
Grassroots Leadership  
Greater Orlando National Organization for Women  
Guadalupe Presbyterian Church, USA  
Hartford Deportation Defense  
HIAS  
Home is Here NOLA  
Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative

Human Impact Partners  
Human Rights Initiative  
Human Rights Watch  
ICNA Council for Social Justice  
Iglesia Bautista Victoria en Cristo (Fort Worth, TX)  
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
Immigrant Action Alliance  
Immigrant Allies of Marshalltown  
Immigrant Defenders Law Center  
Immigrant Defense Advocates  
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project  
Immigrant support committee of St. Andrew's Presbyterian  
Immigrant Welcoming Working Group, Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis  
Immigration Counseling Service  
Immigration Hub  
Immigration Law & Justice Network  
Immigration Working Group, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod - ELCA Pennsylvania  
In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda  
Indivisible  
Indivisible Brooklyn  
Indivisible Marin  
Indivisible Sonoma County  
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice  
Innovation Law Lab  
Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America  
Interfaith Campaign for Just Closures  
Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity  
Interfaith Welcome Coalition - San Antonio  
International Detention Coalition (IDC)  
International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP)  
International Rescue Committee  
Iowa Migrant Movement for Justice  
Ipas  
Janice Vanderhaar Pax Christi Memphis  
Japanese American Citizens League  
Japanese American Citizens League Philadelphia Chapter  
Japanese American Citizens League, Seattle Chapter  
Jewish Activists for Immigration Justice  
Jewish Women International  
JUNTOS Philadelphia

Just Neighbors  
Justice Action Center  
Justice and Peace Advocacy Center  
Justice for Migrant Women  
Justice for Our Neighbors Michigan  
Justice in Motion  
Justice Strategies  
Kern Welcoming and Extending Solidarity to Immigrants  
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)  
La ColectiVA  
Laredo Immigrant Alliance  
Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center  
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)  
Latina Institute Texas  
Latino Community Fund (LCF Georgia)  
Latinx Therapists Action Network  
Lawyers for Good Government  
Legal Aid Justice Center  
Lighthouse Immigrant Advocates  
Long Beach Immigrant Rights Coalition  
Louisiana Advocates for Immigrants in Detention  
Louisiana Organization for Refugees and Immigrants  
Make the Road New Jersey  
Make the Road New York  
Make the Road PA  
Marianist Social Justice Collaborative  
Mariposa Legal, program of COMMON Foundation  
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition  
Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance  
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.  
Miami Coalition to Advance Racial Equity  
Michigan Coalition on Black Civic Participation  
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center  
Michigan United  
Migrant Equity Southeast  
Mijente  
Minnesota Freedom Fund  
Minnesota Interfaith Coalition on Immigration  
Missionarie Sisters of Saint Charles Borromeo Scalabrinians  
MomsRising



Movement for Justice in El Barrio  
MoveOn  
MPower Change  
Mujeres Unidas y Activas  
Muslim Advocates  
Mutual Aid Diabetes  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd  
National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR)  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Crittenton  
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
National Education Association  
National Employment Law Project  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice  
National Lawyers' Guild- SF Bay Area chapter  
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights  
National Organization for Women  
National Partnership for New Americans  
National Partnership for Women & Families  
National Religious Campaign Against Torture  
National Women's Law Center  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Never Again Action  
Never Again Action Boston  
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice  
New Mexico Dream Team  
New York Immigration Coalition  
Nigerian Center  
NM CAFE  
NMHU  
No Detention Centers in Michigan  
NorCal Resist  
Northern New Jersey Sanctuary Coalition  
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project  
Oakland Forward Action Fund  
Oasis Legal Services  
Occupy Bergen County  
OCRRN  
Office of Peace, Justice, and Ecological Integrity/Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth

Ohio Immigrant Alliance  
OneAmerica  
Or Hamidbar, Palm Springs  
Our Children Oregon  
Oxfam America  
ParentsTogether  
Parishioners for Peace & Justice of St. Peter Claver Church, Montclair, NJ  
Pax Christi Florida  
Pax Christi Little Rock  
Pax Christi New Jersey  
Pax Christi New York State  
Pax Christi Northern CA  
Pax Christi Northwest  
Pax Christi Rhode Island  
Pax Christi South Dakota  
Pax Christi USA  
Physicians for Reproductive Health  
Pineros Y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)  
Planned Parenthood Federation of America  
Poder Latinx  
Poligon Education Fund  
POWER-PAC IL  
Pregnancy Justice  
Presbytery of the Pacific, PCUSA  
Pro-Choice North Carolina  
ProgressNow New Mexico  
Project Lifeline  
Project On Government Oversight  
Public Citizen  
Public Law Center  
Qdep  
Refugee Health Alliance  
Refugee Women's Network  
Refugees International  
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, Western American Area  
Religious Sisters of Charity  
Reproductive Health Access Project  
Restaurant Opportunities Centers United  
Rights Behind Bars  
Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights

Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network  
Sanctuary and Resistance to Injustice  
Save the Children  
Scalabrini Immigrant and Refugee Services  
Services, Immigrant Rights and Education Network (SIREN)  
Showing Up for Racial Justice  
Shut Down Berks Coalition  
SÍ - Serving Immigrants  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Justice Team  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, LA  
SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective  
Society of the Flora, fauna & friend  
Sojourners  
SOLACE San Diego  
Somos South GA  
South Bay People Power  
Southern Border Communities Coalition  
Southern Poverty Law Center  
Southern Poverty Law Center Action Fund  
STRANGERS NO LONGER (Michigan)  
Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice  
Sunrise PA  
Supermajority  
Surveillance Technology Oversight Project  
Survived & Punished  
T'ruah  
Tahirih Justice Center  
Tennessee Justice for Our Neighbors  
Texas Freedom Network  
Texas Impact  
The Advocates for Human Rights  
The Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)  
The Bronx Defenders  
The Children's Defense Fund - Texas  
The Children's Partnership  
The Coalition on Human Needs  
the devi co-op  
The Education Trust  
The Festival Center  
The Mami Chelo Foundation

The Sikh Coalition  
The Workers Circle  
The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights  
Trans Empowerment Project  
True Colors United  
Tsuru For Solidarity  
U-Lead Athens  
UltraViolet  
UltraViolet Action  
Unidad Latina en Acción NJ  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Unitarian Universalist FaithAction NJ  
Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice  
United African Organization  
United Parent Leaders Action Network (UPLAN)  
United We Dream  
Unity Fellowship of Christ Church-NYC  
UnLocal  
USOW  
Value our Families  
Vecindarios901  
Vera Institute of Justice  
VOCAL-NY  
#VOTEPROCHOICE  
Voto Latino  
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)  
Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (WICIR)  
We Are All America  
We Testify  
Wellington UCC Immigrant Justice Task Force  
Westchester Jewish Coalition for Immigration  
Western New York Child Care Action Team  
Win Without War  
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center  
Winged Spirit Focus Ministry  
Witness at the Border  
Women Watch Afrika  
Women's Refugee Commission  
Women's March  
ZERO TO THREE