

June 12, 2018

The Honorable Jeff Sessions  
Attorney General  
U.S. Department of Justice  
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable Kirstjen Nielsen  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Attorney General Sessions and Secretary Nielsen,

On behalf of the 26 undersigned national Jewish organizations and institutions, we write to express our strong opposition to the recently expanded “zero-tolerance” policy that includes separating children from their migrant parents when they cross the border. This policy undermines the values of our nation and jeopardizes the safety and well-being of thousands of people.

As Jews, we understand the plight of being an immigrant fleeing violence and oppression. We believe that the United States is a nation of immigrants and how we treat the stranger reflects on the moral values and ideals of this nation.

Many of these migrant families are seeking asylum in the United States to escape violence in Central America. Taking children away from their families is unconscionable. Such practices inflict unnecessary trauma on parents and children, many of whom have already suffered traumatic experiences. This added trauma negatively impacts physical and mental health, including increasing the risk of early death.<sup>1</sup>

Separating families is a cruel punishment for children and families simply seeking a better life and exacerbates existing challenges in our immigration system. It adds to the backlog of deportation cases and legal challenges in federal courts, places thousands more immigrants in detention facilities and shelters, endangers the lives of more children, and instills additional fear in people seeking safety in our country. In addition, those seeking asylum or other legal protection face numerous obstacles to making a claim, especially from detention. Separating family members at the border would force families into two or more immigration cases instead of a single case for each family, harming their ability to present a successful case.

Our Jewish faith demands of us concern for the stranger in our midst. Our own people’s history as “strangers” reminds us of the many struggles faced by immigrants today and compels our commitment to an immigration system in this country that is compassionate and just. We urge

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<sup>1</sup> Michael MacKenzie, Emily Bosk, and Charles Zeanah, “Separation Families at the Border- Consequences for Children’s Health and Well-Being,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, June 15, 2017, *available at* <https://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMp1703375>.

you to immediately rescind the “zero tolerance” policy and uphold the values of family unity and justice on which our nation was built.

Sincerely,

American Conference of Cantors  
American Jewish Committee (AJC)  
American Jewish World Service  
Anti-Defamation League  
B’nai B’rith International  
Bend the Arc Jewish Action  
Central Conference of American Rabbis  
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.  
HIAS  
Jewish Council for Public Affairs  
Jewish Labor Committee  
Jewish Women International  
Men of Reform Judaism  
National Association of Jewish Legislators  
National Council of Jewish Women  
Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies  
NFTY – The Reform Jewish Youth Movement  
Rabbinical Assembly  
Reconstructing Judaism  
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association  
The Workmen's Circle  
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights  
Union for Reform Judaism  
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism  
Uri L'Tzedek, The Orthodox Social Justice Movement  
Women of Reform Judaism