

## FAMILIES BELONG TOGETHER AND FREE

YWCA USA is committed to keeping families together and free and supports immigration legislation and policies that reunify families, provide trauma-informed care and support to impacted individuals and families, protect survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, and provide a path to citizenship for the nearly 3.6 million undocumented immigrant youth brought to the U.S. as children. We stand united with the thousands of women, children, and families we serve daily, who all deserve opportunity and safety.

Any discussion of immigration policies must prioritize the safety of immigrant women, girls, and their families, who are often victims of violence, trafficking, and labor violations. The Administration's adoption of a "zero-tolerance" prosecution policy has led to thousands of children being traumatically taken from their parents' arms and separately detained in facilities that have been compared to internment camps. The President's recent Executive Order claiming to end the practice of family separation through indefinitely detaining families together runs afoul of current domestic and international law. Further, the order failed to provide any guidance as to how separated families would be reunited.

YWCA demands policy solutions that will end family separation, family detention, and the overall criminalization of immigrant families of color, and better ensure their health and safety, including:

**1. An End to Family Separation and the Immediate Reunification of Families**

The Administration must act immediately to permanently end the separation of children from their families and to reunify families separated at the border and around the country due to the Department of Justice's zero-tolerance policy and other harmful immigration policies.

**2. An End to Detention of Children and Families**

Family detention is not an acceptable solution to family separation; families belong together and free. Additionally, the safeguards guaranteed in the *Flores* settlement that protect the health and welfare of children and prevent their indefinite detention must be upheld. Effective alternatives to detention exist that will ensure both the safety of families and their appearance in court as their immigration and asylum cases proceed.

**3. An End to the "Zero-Tolerance" Policy**

Parents should not be criminally prosecuted for trying to bring their children to safety.

**4. Trauma-Informed Care for Impacted Children and Families**

A serious investment in a comprehensive treatment plan is necessary to address the long-term negative impacts of trauma and harm caused to children and families by recent and ongoing family separation policies and practices.

**5. Oversight and Accountability**

Comprehensive oversight and accountability mechanisms must be created to ensure that families are immediately reunited and removed from detention.

## **6. Safety and Support for Victims of Violence**

The claims of victims and survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault who are seeking refuge and asylum in the U.S. must be fully and appropriately reviewed and considered.

## **7. The Dream Act**

Congress must pass a clean Dream Act to provide legal status and a permanent pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who were brought to the U.S. as children.

## **8. An End to Policies and Practices That Criminalize People of Color**

All policies and practices that criminalize immigrant families, people of color, and other marginalized communities must be eliminated.

### **About YWCA**

YWCA has stood with women, children, and families for over 160 years and has a long history of working to improve the lives of women of color, including immigrant women. We began providing bilingual instruction, housing, and skills training to immigrant women in 1909.

Today is no different. Across the country, in small towns and big cities, YWCAs continue to serve and advocate for their communities, including for immigrant women, girls, and their families. YWCAs offer a variety of programming for immigrant women and their families: job placement; housing; health programs; domestic and sexual violence counseling; legal assistance; and multilingual resources and training for immigrant youth and families. We also work nationally to eliminate harmful policies and stereotypes associated with immigrant populations, as well as to support policies that protect immigrant rights.

As direct service providers, YWCA knows that families are at the core of our nation's well-being and that the trauma of separation from caregivers has lifelong negative impacts on children. Any discussion of immigrants' rights or immigration policies must include how to protect and promote the welfare of mixed-status and immigrant families and ensure that these families are not harmed or separated.

In our work as the largest network of domestic violence service providers in the country, YWCA sees daily how immigration status affects a woman's ability to leave and heal from an abuser or perpetrator. Congress has recognized these unique needs, as evidenced by the creation and reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which contains provisions to protect immigrant women who are victims of violence. Future immigration legislation and policies should continue this trend.

And in pursuit of our mission to eliminate racism and empower women, YWCA is invested in legislation, policies, and practices that address the institutionalized use of racial profiling by law enforcement agencies and courts when working within immigrant communities. Increases in border patrol measures and the deputization of police officers as immigration enforcement officers have resulted in added complaints by ethnic, religious, and immigrant communities regarding the misuse of profiling. These methods send a chilling message to communities of color that they are perceived as "illegal" by virtue of their outward appearance.

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