

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 19, 2025

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We strongly object to the failed and inhumane practice of detaining migrant families.¹ We are deeply disturbed by reports that your Administration has revived this cruel policy,² which has proven to be ineffective, costly, and devastating for children and families.

There is a widespread consensus in the United States that family detention poses serious risks to the physical and mental well-being of children. Medical and child welfare experts—including the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association—have consistently condemned this practice, warning that even short-term detention fails to meet basic child welfare standards and exposes children to lasting trauma.³ Even the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) own medical consultants have concluded that family detention presents a “high risk of harm to children and families.”⁴ The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Advisory Committee on Family Residential Centers also determined that family detention should be discontinued.⁵

Family detention is not just damaging to children and families; it is also costly and ineffective. It does not deter migration.⁶ It simply inflicts suffering while draining taxpayer funds at an exorbitant cost. DHS previously spent more than \$866 million over a three-year period to maintain space to detain just over 2,500 families.⁷ Detaining a mother and her children in an ICE

¹ Julia Ainsley, *Trump administration preparing to restart immigrant family detention*, NBC NEWS (Feb. 7, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-administration-preparing-restart-immigrant-family-detention-rcna191230>.

² Camilo Montoya-Galvez, *Trump revives practice of detaining migrant families with children*, CBS NEWS (Mar. 7, 2025), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-revives-practice-of-detaining-migrant-families-with-children/>.

³ Julie M. Linton et al., Policy Statement, *Detention of Immigrant Children*, 139 AM. ACAD. OF PEDIATRICS 5 (May 1, 2017), <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/139/5/e20170483/38727/Detention-of-Immigrant-Children?searchresult=1> (reaffirming this policy statement in 2022); *AMA adopts new policies to improve health of immigrants and refugees*, AM. MED. ASSOC. (Jun. 12, 2017), <https://www.ama-assn.org/ama-adopts-new-policies-improve-health-immigrants-and-refugees>.

⁴ Miriam Jordan, *Whistle-Blowers Say Detaining Migrant Families ‘Poses High Risk of Harm,’* N.Y. TIMES (Jul. 18, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/18/us/migrant-children-family-detention-doctors.html>.

⁵ U.S. IMMIGR. AND CUSTOMS ENF’T ADVISORY COMM. ON FAM. RESIDENTIAL CTRS., *Report of the ICE Advisory Committee on Family Residential Centers* 2, 5 (Oct. 7, 2016), <https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Report/2016/acfrc-report-final-102016.pdf>.

⁶ Adam Cox & Ryan Goodman, *Detention of Migrant Families as “Deterrence”: Ethical Flaws and Empirical Doubts*, JUST SECURITY (Jun. 22, 2018), <https://www.justsecurity.org/58354/detention-migrant-families-deterrence-ethical-flaws-empirical-doubts/>.

⁷ See *Apprehension, Processing, Care, and Custody of Alien Minors and Unaccompanied Alien Children*, 83 Fed. Reg. 45486, 45513 (Sept. 7, 2018).

facility costs an astonishing \$319 per day.⁸ In contrast, Alternatives to Detention (ATD) programs—such as community-based case management—cost as little as \$5 per person per day and have ensured high compliance rates with immigration proceedings.⁹

There is simply no basis for reinstating this cruel, ineffective, and costly practice, particularly when there are effective solutions that, unlike family detention, do not permanently damage children’s health and well-being. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to abandon the use of family detention and instead pursue humane, evidence-based alternatives that prioritize the well-being of children and families while ensuring an orderly and lawful immigration system.

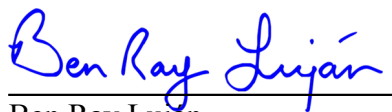
Sincerely,



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



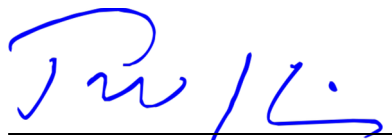
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



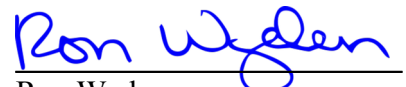
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

⁸ Jordana Signer, *Immigrant Detention Is Expensive, and Alternatives Are Just As Effective*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/15/immigrant-detention-expensive-and-alternatives-are-just-effective>.

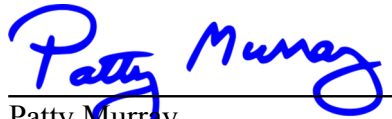
⁹ *The Harms of Family Detention*, WOMEN’S REFUGEE COMM’N 2 (Mar. 2023), <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Why-Family-Detention-Cannot-Be-Answer-to-Increased-Migration-Displacement.pdf>.




Jon Ossoff
United States Senator




Ron Wyden
United States Senator



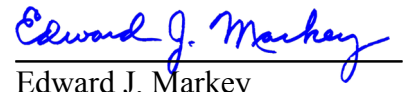
Patty Murray
United States Senator




Bernard Sanders
United States Senator




Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



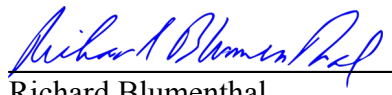
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator




Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



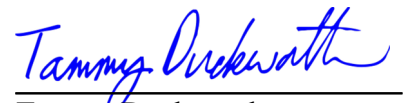
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



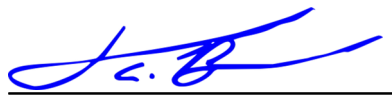
Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



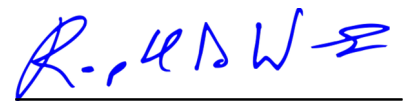
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman, Senate Committee on the Judiciary