



Statement for the Record

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

"How Mass Deportations Will Separate American Families, Harm Our Armed Forces, and Devastate Our Economy"

December 20, 2024

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, We appreciate the opportunity to submit a statement for the record for the hearing "How Mass Deportations Will Separate American Families, Harm Our Armed Forces, and Devastate Our Economy." Children's HealthWatch is a network of pediatricians, public health researchers, and policy and child health experts who examine how policies impact the health and well-being of young children.

The mission of Children's HealthWatch is to achieve health equity for young children and their families by advancing research to transform policy. We accomplish this mission by interviewing caregivers of young children in emergency departments and primary care clinics in five cities: Boston, Minneapolis, Little Rock, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. Since 1998, we have interviewed more than 75,000 caregivers and analyzed data from those interviews to determine the impact of public policies on the health and development of young children. More than 25 percent of the young children in this dataset have immigrant mothers, mirroring national statistics that one in four children under age 8 in the US has at least one immigrant parent.¹

With our expertise in child health and development, we know that immigration enforcement measures like mass deportation can have long term negative impacts on the health of young children, including children who are American citizens. With this knowledge we urge Congress to reject restrictive immigration policies that would lead to mass deportations, as those policies would have serious, adverse impacts on the health of young children, put children at risk of parental separation and detention, and cause a chilling effect that results in families not accessing health care and other supports for which they or their children are eligible.

Stressors Facing Immigrant Families Impacts the Health of their Children

Immigrant families are an integral part of our communities—they are our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and fellow parents. Of the one in four children who have an immigrant parent, 93.3 percent were born in the United States.^{2,3}

Even though citizen children with an immigrant parent are more likely to live in a family with a full-time worker compared to children of US-born parents,⁴ their families disproportionately experience food insecurity, struggle to afford housing costs, and lack access to health care.^{5,6,7} Each of these hardships is

associated with adverse health and developmental outcomes for young children,^{8,9,10} including for US citizen children of immigrant mothers.

The first years of life are crucial for healthy growth and development. Exposure to trauma and disruption during this critical window has grave impacts on the long-term physical, emotional, cognitive and mental health of infants and toddlers.^{11,12} Witnessing a deportation or even just the fear of a family member being taken away puts children in a constant state of uncertainty and stress. Research has shown that children whose parents know people who have been deported are 2.4 times more likely to have been referred or diagnosed with a developmental disorder.¹³ Additionally, when parents are detained or deported it can leave their children unattended without someone to care and provide for them, an especially dangerous situation for young children.

It is not just the individual deported who is affected, but also those in their communities who are left with residual stress and uncertainty, and children separated from parents. Prior actions¹⁴ such as mass deportations have resulted in spikes in preterm births¹⁵ in areas where raids have happened, as well as major psychological¹⁶ and material harm to children in the community.¹⁷

The choice to conduct mass deportations is a choice to put the health and well-being of children, many of whom are US citizens, at risk.

Stress and Fear in Immigrant Communities Limits Access to Health Care

A Children's HealthWatch study conducted in pediatric emergency rooms and primary care clinics in Boston, Little Rock, and Minneapolis showed that the xenophobic atmosphere during the 2016 election and early months of the Trump presidency was associated with a five-percentage point decrease in adherence to well-child visits among immigrant mothers, compared to their U.S. counterparts who did not have a decrease between 2015 and 2018.¹⁸

Well-child visits are incredibly important for developing children as they provide an opportunity for children to receive vaccinations, get screened for a variety of physical and mental illnesses, and for parents to seek guidance and receive resources on how to best care for their children. Thus, a decrease in well-child visits can further exacerbate existing health disparities and be detrimental to a child's development.

In addition to well-child visits, anti-immigrant rhetoric in the first Trump presidency was associated with delayed Medicaid enrollment among pregnant immigrant woman and lower birth weights for their infants.¹⁹ For school-aged children in Baltimore, Trump's first presidency was followed by a decrease in primary care visits and an increase in emergency department visits for undocumented, Medicaid-ineligible children compared with Medicaid-eligible children.²⁰ During pregnancy and in early childhood frequent contact with the health care system is expected and encouraged to ensure the health of the child. Without these touch points parents forgo necessary care and may only bring a child to a doctor or hospital in an emergency situation – costing more money and potentially putting the child at risk of serious health consequences.

Immigrants are a Key Part of the Workforce and Local Economies

Immigrants are also integral to our economy, making up 17.4% of the US workforce in 2018. Their children are projected to offset the decline in working-age population as Baby Boomers retire by adding

18 million working-age people to the population between 2015 and 2035.²¹ Furthermore, immigrant families are a fundamental part of our American history and values.

Mass deportations would impact the economy negatively in two key ways:

First, families affected by deportation face sudden income loss, leading to food insecurity, housing instability, and reduced access to healthcare. When an income earner is removed from the household it is only natural that it would impact the economics of that household. In addition, if a parent caring for a child is removed, that household now faces the additional cost of child care. Therefore, deporting a family member is not only traumatic because that person is no longer in the home breaking emotional ties, it also can push that household into poverty.

Second, communities and employers who rely on the work of immigrants, such as agriculture, service, and health care, no longer have a workforce. With mass deportations communities can lose people who shop in their stores and rent their apartments. Employers can lose workers critical to operating their business. Small communities impacted by large scale raids have struggled to recover from the economic shocks, putting the entire community at risk.²²

Conclusion

Comprehensive evidence demonstrates that forced family separations, economic instability, and the fear of deportation harm children's mental and physical health, impede their educational progress, and undermine the nation's long-term prosperity. The mass deportation of undocumented immigrants is not only inhumane but also counterproductive to the nation's goals of promoting family stability and economic growth.

For hundreds of years, the United States has welcomed immigrants and their dream for a better, more prosperous life. However, invoking policies that would lead to mass deportations threaten these values. Policies of fear and punishment do not build a brighter future for American communities with healthy people and strong workers; to the contrary, such policies will compromise the health of current and future generations, diminish their ability to excel in school, work and life, and diminish the human potential of communities across the nation.

Children's HealthWatch strongly urges the Senate Judiciary Committee to instead support evidence-based policies that safeguard the health, safety, and future of all children in the United States. By prioritizing family unity and investing in the well-being of children, Congress can uphold American values and ensure a healthier, more prosperous future.

¹ Migration Policy Institute. Children in U.S. immigrant families (By age and state, 1990 versus 2015). Available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/children-immigrant-families>

² Park M, McHugh M, Katsiaficas. Serving immigrant families through two-generation programs. Migration Policy Institute. 2016. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/serving-immigrant-families-through-two-generation-programs-identifying-family-needs->

³ Migration Policy Institute. Children in U.S. immigrant families (By age, zero to 5, and state, 1990 versus 2017). Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends#children>

⁴ Kaiser Family Foundation analysis of March 2017 Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement.

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- ⁶ Hernandez D and Napierala JS. Children in Immigrant Families: Essential to America's Future. Foundation for Child Development Child and Youth Well-Being Index. 2012.
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- ¹⁷ Cervantes et al., Our Children Fear: Immigration Policies Effect Young Children, CLASP, [2018_ourchildrensfears.pdf \(clasp.org\)](#)
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