



For Release:

American Psychoanalytic Association Calls Policy to Separate Immigrant Children Cruel, Inhumane and Harmful

New York – May 31, 2018 - As psychoanalysts we are gravely concerned with the Trump Administration's zero tolerance policy that separates children from their parents when migrant families and asylum seekers are caught illegally entering the country or turning themselves in at border crossings.

Based on a large body of research and literature, this policy is not only cruel and inhumane (and contrary to our values), but it is also harmful for the health and mental well-being of children and their development as well as for their parents. Forced separations, even briefly, can cause long-lasting trauma and lead to serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Taking children away from their caregivers will also interfere later with learning, social relationships, and socioeconomic status.

In a recent congressional hearing (May 15, 2018), Senator Kamala Harris (D-CA), in questioning Secretary of Homeland Security, Kirstjen Neilson, stated that government figures show that 700 children have been separated from their parents since October 2017 and 100 were under four-years-old. During the hearing, it was troubling to hear that Secretary Neilson was unclear if any protocols are used to make these separations less traumatic or whether children are able to communicate with their parents. These steps could help decrease the likelihood of irreparable harm.

As mental health professionals we value both individual experience and group identity. Appreciating the differences and distinct human narratives that exist across racial, cultural, and religious groups is a source for individual and group strength. We witness every day the lived historical trauma in individuals, often passed from one generation to the next, and the next. The cycle of damage demands ongoing efforts at healing for succeeding generations. Such traumas become a part of the history of a people and of a nation. We call for the protection of all

families and children within our country's borders, and succeeding generations of Americans, from the trauma of dividing families and separating children from their parents.

We remind the Trump Administration, and Congress, that migrant families, often fleeing oppression and violence, bring their children with the hope for a new and productive life. Our country was built on a history of keeping that hope alive, and facilitating physical, emotional, and social well-being of all families and children. The current policy of separating immigrant children from their parents remains in opposition of that history, is harmful, and must come to an end.

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