

Children's Advocacy Organizations Decry Attacks on Children Seeking Safety in the United States

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington, D.C., MARCH 22, 2022—As a community of 40 organizations who work on behalf of children, we unite today to demand an end to attacks on immigrant children and to correct dangerous misinformation campaigns about children and their families at the border and within the United States. Together, we are working to create policies that recognize the humanity and dignity of immigrant children—a system where children are valued, not targeted or vilified.

In recent months, we have witnessed an outbreak of state laws and policies—some proposed, others implemented—that attempt to strip protections from immigrant children. In February, [Florida's child welfare agency confirmed](#) that it will not issue or renew licenses for shelters or providers in Florida that care for unaccompanied immigrant children. That action followed a [roundtable where the Florida Governor](#) lashed out at unaccompanied immigrant children, falsely denying their valid claims for protection and right to family unity. Before Florida, in September 2021, [Texas stripped licenses from children's facilities](#). The effort, championed by the Texas Governor, has left immigrant children in federal custody in Texas without a key oversight mechanism for reporting and investigating conditions in facilities. Most recently officials in Tennessee [introduced a discriminatory bill](#) that would separate and criminalize immigrant families.

Officials from [New York](#), [Pennsylvania](#), and [Tennessee](#) have also spread [harmful misinformation](#) about immigrant children who are reuniting with their families. Using [rhetoric](#) that has [no basis in truth](#), politicians are creating a false narrative about immigrant youth seeking protection, following a well-worn path of criminalizing youth of color. They are also creating a false dichotomy between protecting unaccompanied children and protecting all children, their families, and their communities.

Here is the truth about children who arrive at our border: They have traveled thousands of miles, often alone, fleeing violence, persecution, abuse, and trafficking in order to find safety. For two decades, bipartisan Congresses have passed laws to ensure that these unaccompanied and separated children are screened for protection needs, taken into custody, and have an opportunity to reunify with family while their immigration cases wind their way through highly adversarial immigration court proceedings. Children have to prove their right to remain in the United States, against a government attorney and without the guarantee of their own attorney, independent Child Advocate, or services that would support their healthy development.

Despite all these obstacles, children are resilient and have big dreams for the new life they will build here. Because the deck is otherwise stacked against children seeking protection in the United States, we should do everything to ensure that they are safe, reunited with their families, and have a fair and child-centered process to find safe haven. Changes in state policies that delay children's reunification with family adversely impact their safety and well-being, and risk forcing them through immigration proceedings while they are still detained, without access to the protective factors offered by a family environment.

The barrage of anti-child, anti-immigrant fear-mongering—rhetoric specifically targeting vulnerable children—we have witnessed in recent months is antithetical to our values. It doesn't help our communities or make them safer. Rather, it instills fear in our neighborhoods, causes family separation, and undermines the legal process for children to seek safety in the United States. Our laws and policies

must and should ensure that unaccompanied children have what all children need: safety, family unity, and the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Signed,

Bazon Center for Mental Health Law
Catholic Charities Community Services of New York, Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
Center for Law and Social Policy
Center on Immigration & Child Welfare
Central American Resource Center-CARECEN-of California
Children's Defense Fund
Children's Rights
Church World Service
Church World Service Lancaster
First Focus on Children
Florence Immigrant & Refugee Rights Project
Florida Legal Services, Inc.
Galveston-Houston Immigrant Representation Project
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Human Rights Watch
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)
Immigration Counseling Service
Justice For Our Neighbors - North Central Texas
Juvenile Law Center
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
National Association of Counsel for Children
National Association of Social Workers - Texas Chapter
National Center for Youth Law
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
Orlando Center for Justice, Inc.
Public Counsel
RAICES (Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services)
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
Save the Children
Texas Impact
The Door
The Legal Aid Society (New York)
Tsuru for Solidarity
Vera Institute of Justice
Women's Refugee Commission
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights