July 2nd, 2018

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
U.S. House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Nadler
Ranking Member
U.S. House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

We remain extremely concerned about the welfare of children who have been separated from their parents upon crossing the U.S. border. We ask you and your congressional colleagues to take immediate steps to investigate the administration’s policies of separation and co-incarceration of these children and their parents. Additionally, we believe it critical to develop clear guidelines that prevent any abuse or trauma for children detained by immigration officials.

As you are aware, the Administration’s “zero tolerance policy” required border officials to separate children from their parents, even when these families were seeking protection from dangerous persecution in their home countries. U.S. immigration law allows those seeking asylum to present themselves to border patrol agents and have their case heard by a judge.

News reports have indicated that the thousands of children under the age of 12 are being held in “tender age” detention centers. Many are babies and toddlers who need special care and for whom the forcible separation from their families can be particularly traumatic. Visitors to these detention centers describe babies and children crying uncontrollably and suffering from panic attacks. Many of them do not speak english or speak at all, making it difficult for their caretakers to calm these children.

The negative consequences of forcible separation of children from their parents are well documented. According to medical professionals, parental separation is considered a toxic stressor, and the effects of separation can have lasting effects into adulthood even after children have been reunited with their parents. Children who are separated often experience mental health issues, poor social functioning, insecure attachment, disrupted stress reactivity, and even death. Many child health and development experts have identified the practice of separation as causing trauma and stress child abuse.
We urge Congress to investigate the child separation policy as well as the current policy of detaining children with their parents, to ensure that all federal laws were followed and to ensure children are not subject to abuse while detained by immigration officials. Further, we ask that Congress require the administration to immediately reunite families separated under this policy and provide these families with every available resource to help avoid the long term effects of this trauma and abuse. We also urge your support of “Keep Families Together Act” (S.3036) to bring a clear end to the practices of family separation.

The United States is better than this. In time, we can work to heal the wounds of these children while ensuring that no child will suffer in this way at the hands of the U.S. government.

Sincerely,

John W. Hickenlooper
Governor

Kelly Causey, PhD
President and CEO
Colorado Children’s Campaign

Meghan Treitz, MD, FAAP
President
American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter

Leon Que, MD
President
Colorado Psychiatric Society

Adam Burstein, DO
President
Colorado Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Society

Cc:
U.S. Senator Michael Bennet
U.S. Senator Cory Gardner
U.S. Representative Ed Perlmutter
U.S. Representative Jared Polis
U.S. Representative Diana DeGette
U.S. Representative Mike Coffman

U.S. Representative Doug Lamborn
U.S. Representative Ken Buck
U.S. Representative Scott Tipton

Rebecca Richey, Psy.D.
President
Colorado Psychological Association

Richard D. Krugman, M.D.
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