



Statement of Omaha Together One Community (OTOC) regarding the ongoing detention of children and families seeking asylum

July 2, 2018



Conditions in Central America, Mexico, and other countries have sent many families fleeing violence, often to save their lives. As a coalition of diverse congregations and community organizations, OTOC upholds the principles of our founding members concerning immigration. These include the dignity of persons, family reunification, due process, effective border security, and the universal right to seek asylum when faced with violence or persecution.

To separate children from their parents is an abhorrent policy. To force parents to choose between either pursuing asylum claims or being reunited with their children is not consistent with these principles. Even as President Trump signed an executive order to end the separation of families, there are still children and infants separated from their parents. Much work remains to be done. It is up to Congress to make sure the Administration takes all necessary steps to fix this problem. OTOC is an organization rooted in Judeo-Christian and democratic ideals, including those expressed in the immortal words of our Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Therefore, we urge the Administration and Congress to do the following:

- 1) Reunite with their parents the over 2,300 children who are currently in custody. We want the Administration to do this quickly and effectively. Congress must insure that adequate funding is appropriated for this task.
- 2) Do not detain families. The Alternatives to Detention (ATD) are more humane, effective, and economical. In FY 2018, the Dept. of Homeland Security estimates the average cost for ATD per participant would be \$4.30 per day. This is less than 7% of the cost to hold that person in detention. (Justice for Immigrants website)
- 3) While children without their parents remain in custody, the government must ensure that independent groups of pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, and pediatric nurses monitor the centers and guarantee that these children—and especially infants—are getting the care they need.
- 4) We urge support for the Flores settlement, which establishes a 20-day legal limit for the detention of minors—with or without their parents. This settlement restricts the time children may be subject to inhumane treatment.

To paraphrase former president George H.W. Bush, we must avoid making a whole sector of our society illegal. The vast majority of immigrants are honorable, decent, hardworking, and family-loving people. Many are asylum seekers. They are not criminals. Let's treat them with the dignity they deserve.