

President – Tony GiaQuinta, MD, FAAP
Vice President – Emily Scott, MD, FAAP
Secretary/Treasurer – Meagan O’Neill, MD, FAAP
Past President – Sarah Bosslet, MD, FAAP
Executive Director – Christopher Weintraut, JD



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Fort Wayne, IN 46802

Dear Editor:

For Indiana pediatricians, watching the media reports of children separated at the southern border of the U.S. is alarming for several different reasons. We certainly have trouble understanding a moral justification for separating children from their parents, much less a legal one. But as pediatricians, **this policy contradicts everything we know about promoting and protecting children's health. Last Thursday Attorney General Jeff Sessions chose to defend this objectionable policy during a speech Fort Wayne, Indiana. In response, our community needs to speak out and show that we are opposed to this policy.**

A 2017 policy statement from the American Academy of Pediatrics entitled, "[Detention of Immigrant Children](#)," urges that separation of a parent or primary caregiver from his or her children should never occur, unless there are concerns for the safety of the child at the hand of the parent. The Academy's position opposing family separation stems from the serious health consequences that this practice has on children.

Our academy is adamantly opposed to a policy that uses separation of children from the parents as a means to deter migration. As such, we join with over 500 other organizations from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico who have spoken out against the travesty unfolding before our eyes. These organizations, like our own, have recognized expertise in the fields of child welfare, juvenile justice, and child health development. The consensus is clear: we are irreparably harming these children.

There is overwhelming evidence that separating children from their mothers or fathers leads to serious, negative consequences to children's health and development. Forced separation disrupts the parent-child relationship and puts children at increased risk for both physical and mental illness. Adverse childhood experiences—including the incarceration of a family member—are well-recognized precursors of negative health outcomes later in life.

For the thousands of children now separated from their parents, the psychological distress, anxiety, and depression associated with this experience will follow them well after the immediate period of separation—even after eventual reunification with a parent or other family.

Family unity is a foundational principle of child welfare law. In order to grow and develop, children need to remain in the care of their parents where they are loved, nurtured and feel safe. Thus, parents' rights to the care and custody of their children are afforded particularly strong protection in the United States.

We don't accept that these children, migrants from another country, are not ours to care for. As an academy of 70,000 pediatrician, our mission is simple: we care for all children, whenever and wherever possible. These children are here, and we feel strongly that they deserve our care and protection.

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If a child comes to our office with non-accidental trauma we are mandated to report this to DCS so they can help investigate and improve the child’s situation. Indeed, the current practice of systematically separating children from their parents is purposefully placing children in great harm to their health and wellbeing. This task is outside of our local DCS jurisdiction, so our Senators and Congressmen will receive our call. We urge all Hoosiers to do the same

Sincerely,

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American Academy of Pediatrics

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