



One Hundred Fifteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

March 8, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane SW
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Kelly:

We are deeply troubled by your comments yesterday confirming the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is considering separating children from their parents at the border.

Trying to "discourage" people fleeing violence and extreme poverty from seeking safety in the U.S. by threatening to take their children away from them is unconscionable. As former commander of U.S. Southern Command, you have acknowledged the "unimaginable violence" so many of these families are fleeing in Central America.¹ Certainly, parents would not undertake such a journey with their children if the situation at home was not absolutely dire.

DHS forcing children into shelters or foster care when their mothers or fathers are with them would be inhumane and runs contrary to American values. Underscoring the potentially devastating effect this policy would have on children, the American Academy of Pediatrics recently warned, "Federal authorities must exercise caution to ensure that the emotional and physical stress children experience as they seek refuge in the United States is not exacerbated by the additional trauma of being separated from their siblings, parents or other relatives and caregivers."² We ask you to heed this warning, and instead find other ways to address the humanitarian situation at the border.

Again, we strongly urge you to reject this cruel and misguided policy. To do otherwise would be a black mark in the history of not just DHS, but of America.


¹ Nomination of General John F. Kelly, USMC (Ret.), to be Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Homeland Security and Gov't Affairs, 115th Cong. (2017).

² AAP Statement Opposing Separation of Mothers and Children at the Border (2017), <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/federal-advocacy/pages/immigrationreform.aspx> (last visited Mar 7, 2017).


Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Ranking Member



FILEMON VELA
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Border and
Maritime Security



DONALD M. PAYNE, JR.
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness,
Response and Communications