



## **American Pediatric Surgical Association Statement on Children and US Immigration Policy**

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*“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.” Nelson Mandela.*

The current zero-tolerance immigration policy of the Department of Homeland Security has sent thousands of children to mass detention centers in the last two months. These children have been forcefully separated from their parents and held in prison-like centers, where crying children cannot even be comforted.

The detention of children has been condemned worldwide by many professional and human rights organizations. Research has shown that detained children suffer physical and emotional distress. Children who have been held in detention suffer from post traumatic stress disorder, major depression, self-harming behaviors, anxiety disorders and report sleeping difficulties, poor concentration, a sense of hopelessness, overwhelming boredom, thoughts of death and dying, and recurrent para-suicidal ideation (Mares & Jureidini, 2004). Being held in a prison-like setting, even for a short duration, can cause children to suffer psychological trauma that increases their risk for future mental disorders (Cleveland, Rousseau, & Kronick, 2012). The current policy of the DHS is inflicting lifelong damage to the health of these children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, an internationally recognized legal framework for the protection of children’s basic rights that has been ratified by every other country in the world, emphasizes that children seeking asylum should be provided special protections (article 22), that children should be free from arbitrary arrest and detention (article 37), that children should not be separated from their parents against their will, except when competent authorities ... determine ... that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child (article 9), and that children in detention should be treated humanely and appropriately (article 9). These fragile children deserve treatment that will not harm or traumatize them and services that support their overall health and well-being.

The American Pediatric Surgical Association condemns the current zero-tolerance policy that separates children from their parents and places them into detention centers. As a community of surgeons dedicated to the optimal health and well-being of children, we cannot stand by silently while irreparable physical and mental harm is being perpetrated against these innocents. We call on the members of Congress and Senate

to immediately stop the separation of children from their parents and the subsequent detention of these children.

We stand with these children and use our collective voice to fight for the optimal well-being and health for these and all children.

Cleveland, J., Rousseau, C., & Kronick, R. (2012, April). The harmful effects of detention and family separation on asylum seekers' mental health in the context of Bill C-31. Brief Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration concerning Bill C-31, the *Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act*, pp. 3- 7. Retrieved from [http://www.csssdelamontagne.qc.ca/fileadmin/csss\\_dlm/Publications/Publications\\_CRF/brief\\_c31\\_fi nal.pdf](http://www.csssdelamontagne.qc.ca/fileadmin/csss_dlm/Publications/Publications_CRF/brief_c31_fi nal.pdf).

Coffey, G.J., Kaplan, I., Sampson, R.C., & Tucci, M.M. (2010) [The meaning and mental health consequences of long-term immigration detention for people seeking asylum](#). *Social Science & Medicine*, 70(12), 2070-2079.

Mares, S. & Jureidini, J. (2004). [Psychiatric assessment of children and families in immigration detention: Clinical, administrative, and ethical issues](#). *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 28, 520-526. doi:10.1111/j.1467-842X.2004.tb00041.x

United Nations General Assembly. Convention on the Rights of the Child. [www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf).

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