

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HILDA L. SOLIS AND
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Opposing the Separation of Children and Families at the U.S.-Mexico Border

Last month, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the government would criminally prosecute everyone who crosses the U.S.-Mexico border illegally. This federal directive has separated children from their parents and channeled them into foster care, resulting in suffering for everyone involved. For example, *The Washington Post* recently reported that Marco Antonio Muñoz traveled from Honduras with his wife and three-year-old son. On arrival at the border in Texas, the child was forcibly removed from his father’s arms. Mr. Muñoz was later found dead, having committed suicide in his cell.

Children and their parents are traveling to the United States to pursue safer, more humane living conditions. These families have often traveled long and arduous journeys in pursuit of asylum and better opportunities. Nevertheless, their arrival in the United States is often marked by even more egregious harm at the hands of federal officials. Indeed, *The New York Times* recently chronicled the story of five-year-old

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José, who was placed in foster care after being separated from his father at the border. For days, the child slept with drawings of his family under his pillow and cried himself to sleep. This federally sanctioned trauma, imposed entirely by choice, has been deemed “inhumane and counterproductive” by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Federal officials state that their aim is to curb illegal immigration, not to separate children and their families. However, separation is inevitable since the federal government asserts that children cannot be held in federal detention facilities with their families while the parents await their court dates. With no one to protect them, children often sleep in cage-like, federal facilities and on cement floors, without proper care, enrichment or support for weeks and even months. A recent report, released by the American Civil Liberties Union and the International Human Rights Clinic at the University of Chicago Law School, documents the pervasive abuse and neglect of unaccompanied immigrant children detained by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. For example, the report outlines numerous cases involving federal officials’ verbal, physical and sexual abuse of migrant children; the denial of clean drinking water and adequate food; failure to provide necessary medical care; detention in freezing, unsanitary facilities; and other violations of federal law, policy and international law. The circumstances facing these children and families are reprehensible, unconscionable, and un-American.

The County of Los Angeles (County) stands in opposition to these federally sanctioned actions and demands humane and safe treatment for children and families seeking safety in the United States. The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has established protocols to identify, track, and provide aid to the

Unaccompanied Undocumented Minors (UUM) population in the County. As of April 30, 2018, DCFS had identified 72 UUM children, all of whom originate from Central America – Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. To aid these children, when DCFS receives a call on its hotline about a potential unaccompanied immigrant minor, a determination is made regarding the appropriate response. If no parent/guardian, relative, or ORR identified sponsor is identified to provide for the child, a petition is filed with the dependency court, the child is placed in foster care, and referred to one of DCFS's pro bono immigration attorneys to assist with any pending legal action in the immigration courts.

As changes are made to immigration enforcement orders at the federal level, the County should continue its longstanding efforts toward ensuring that children are properly cared for and receive the appropriate aid from County departments and community partners.

WE THEREFORE MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Officer to send a 5-signature letter to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, the Senate and House Leadership, and the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation opposing the practice of separating children from their families and urging that no funding be approved for the prosecution of parents seeking asylum who arrive at the border with minor children;
2. Direct DCFS and the Office of Immigrant Affairs to report to the County Counsel any children who were separated from their parents at the border, who could be in LA County foster care/relative care and, where possible, offer assistance in

contacting federal officials so that minors can be released into foster/relative care while their parents are in detention;

3. Direct the Office of Immigrant Affairs, in coordination with County Counsel, to contact the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement and request permission to visit shelters (operated by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services) to offer assistance to any minors that could be released into the custody of relatives in Los Angeles County, through the Department of Children and Family Services.

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