January 14, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Nebraska Avenue Complex  
3801 Nebraska Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

The undersigned lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) organizations write to express our deep opposition to the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) tactics of conducting raids in communities nationwide to round up and deport Central American children and their families.¹

We are committed to ensuring the safety, health, and welfare of all LGBTQ immigrants in the United States and we are disappointed that DHS has decided to use tactics that instill fear into immigrant communities. These raids plainly contravene President Obama’s directive to “more humanely” enforce our nation’s immigration laws.² Instead of raids, DHS should take measurable steps to protect people that are fleeing tremendous levels of violence.

As an LGBTQ community, we understand the vital importance of safe places to live. In the summer of 2014, we saw a wave of parents and children arrive to the U.S. to escape extreme violence in Central America. These parents fled because of gangs murdering their spouses, attempting to recruit their sons, and threatening sexual violence against them and their children.³ The majority of these cases lacked access to legal advice and assistance, often because of financial, logistical, or governmental obstacles. Without adequate legal counsel, many do not understand the intricacies of court proceedings and struggle to get their cases heard adequately and fairly.⁴

Additionally, we believe a substantial portion of those who are currently in removal proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) are people with a disability, as that term is defined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.⁵ A very high proportion of the Central American mothers and children now targeted for ICE raids have survived sexual assault or other forms of extreme violence, have mourned the loss of close family members to particularized

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⁵ See 42 U.S.C. § 12102(1).
violence, and today suffer the inevitable consequences of exposure to this trauma. This means that a substantial proportion of the Central American parents and children who have sought refuge in the U.S. are suffering from severe symptoms of—and in many cases likely meet diagnostic criteria for—posttraumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety, and depression.

Consequently, we request that you call for an immediate review of the underlying removal orders on which DHS raids are purportedly based in order to confirm that the orders were not obtained in violation of the Rehabilitation Act. Raids are not the answer, especially for the broader LGBTQ immigrant community. Countless studies show the negative impact that raids have for immigrant communities. Children are pulled from school, immigrant owned businesses suffer, and immigrants fear reaching out to get for basic services- even if they themselves are not the targets of the raids. These negative impacts are even more harrowing for LGBTQ immigrants that already report higher levels of violence and discrimination based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. These raids will only serve to push our LGBTQ immigrant community further into the shadows.

Consistent with our welcoming immigrant tradition to harbor those fleeing violence and persecution, DHS must end the use of raids that drive fear into immigrant communities. Additionally, DHS should exercise its statutory authority to extend relief and due process to all families fleeing violence.

This country has proven to be a beacon of hope for thousands of LGBTQ immigrants that face violence. We ask you extend that same level of respect to these families and champion their protection.

We look forward to speaking with you about this matter. Please contact Zenen Jaime Perez with the United We Dream Network at (512) 914-5905 or zenen@unitedwedream.org for more information or to discuss.

Sincerely,

Aquí Estamos
Association of Latino/as Motivating Action (ALMA)
CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers
Collectively Free

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Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC)
Equality New Mexico
GALAEI
Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders
GLAD Alliance
GSA Network
Human Rights Campaign
Immigration Equality
La Clinica del Pueblo
Lambda Legal
League of United Latin American Citizens
Manantial de Gracia
Marriage Equality USA
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National LGBTQ Task Force
National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance
Our Family Coalition
Pride at Work
Queer Detainee Empowerment Project
RAD Remedy
Social Workers for Reproductive Justice
The DC Center for the LGBT Community
The LGBT Center Orange County
The Los Angeles LGBT Center
Trans Pride Initiative
Trans Student Educational Resources
United We Dream

CC:

Sarah Saldaña
Director, Immigration & Customs Enforcement
Department of Homeland Security