

January 20, 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 educators and administrators 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 children and their families and cause fear in immigrant communities.

Shortly after New Year's Day 2016, DHS announced a series of highly publicized immigration raids to apprehend, detain, and deport Central Americans—most of whom were mothers and children—who came to this country over the past two years seeking protection. 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.

Since then, we have seen news stories of Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) personnel entering homes—sometimes without a warrant or consent—and roused children from beds before taking families into custody. These tactics do nothing but instill fear into immigrant communities.

As educators, we know firsthand the need for safe spaces for all of our students and their families. Due to these raids, students have had to choose between an education and their safety, others have been pulled from school and many have already had their daily lives disrupted. Studies show that the fear and isolation stemming from immigration raids can lead to serious mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal thoughts for students.¹ As educators we are concerned about the safety and well-being of our students and their families in all aspects. While they are on their way to our schools or general educational settings, on school grounds, and or within our classrooms and universities, we want to make sure our students have spaces that ensure their safety and well-being.

Additionally, a substantial portion of those who are currently in removal proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) are already people living with a disability, as that term is defined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.² A very high proportion of the Central

¹ Randy Capps, Rosa Maria Castañeda, Ajay Chaudry, and Robert Santos, "Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America's Children" (Washington: The Urban Institute, National Council of La Raza, 2007), available at <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/411566-Paying-the-Price-The-Impact-of-Immigration-Raids-on-America-s-Children.PDF>.

² 42 U.S.C. § 12102(1).

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 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. We also ask DHS to end the use of raids that drive fear into immigrant communities and extend prompt relief and due process to all families fleeing violence.

As stated in Plyler V Doe, various dear colleague letters addressing immigrant students and their families and the most recent guide for college created by the U.S. Department of Education; as educators, we cannot ignore the very real traumas and challenges our students and their families face. We are committed to providing the best possible education and safe space for any student regardless of immigration status. We ask you send that same level of respect to these families and champion their protection which consequently advocates for their educational success.

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

Sincerely,

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