

**Topline Messages:** One year after the largest worksite immigration raids in U.S. history brought so much pain to Mississippi communities, families there are demonstrating remarkable resilience.

A recent report from CLASP on the Mississippi, Ohio, and Texas immigration raids in 2018 and 2019 shows that immigration raids separate families, harms children, destabilizes communities, and punishes workers who are now deemed “essential” during the pandemic. Raids challenge families and children in ways that are needlessly cruel and completely counterproductive to building a stronger society.

Instead of arresting immigrant workers, our government should follow the lead of local communities and embrace the contributions of immigrants seeking a better life for their families and communities.

### **Key Points:**

**Mississippians are demonstrating remarkable resilience one year after these needlessly cruel attacks on workers and families.** During the last year, Mississippi immigrants have faced ICE, deportations, and incarceration; stood with Black siblings and dealt with the tremendous disparities in disbursement of resources; and lost loved ones to COVID-19. Through this all, community members have held their heads high and continued to resist. Their message: “A year later we’re still standing. We're still here.”

**Immigrants arrested in Mississippi a year ago were working in jobs now deemed “essential” by politicians.** The COVID crisis has brought the contributions of immigrant workers into even clearer view. Many immigrants harvest and process the food we all eat alongside U.S. citizens. The United States must honor and support the role that all essential workers play, at great risk to themselves and their families, including those who are immigrants.

**The Trump administration used worksite immigration raids to harass and intimidate humble workers, the majority of whom are parents to U.S. citizen children.** The federal government brought helicopters, hundreds of armed agents, and K-9 units to arrest immigrant workers at garden centers, factories, and food plants across the United States. Each of the raids covered in this study was considered the largest in U.S. history at the time they occurred, and the raid in Mississippi remains the largest single state operation. Terrorizing families and communities in the name of enforcing our immigration laws is a gross misuse of resources.

**ICE did not follow its own “humanitarian” guidelines to keep children safe and minimize strain on local communities.** When parents were arrested at work, children were left stranded at schools or with child care providers with no one to pick them up. ICE did not notify local social service agencies or schools ahead of the raids as required under the agency’s own guidelines. This left children vulnerable and alone. In Mississippi, this created particular challenges because it was the first day of school for many of the locations that experienced raids, leaving schools to scramble to ensure children were taken care of.

**In Mississippi and other places that experienced immigration raids, we saw the same profound impacts on children, families, and communities.** The raids’ consequences are clear: trauma and total devastation of family economic security and mental and physical health--from the parents down to the youngest children, who are most likely U.S. citizens. Specifically, we documented:

- **Families Torn Apart:** Families experienced separation ranging from several hours to months, including long-term separation due to the deportation of a parent.
  - In some cases, the only reason parents were eventually reunited with their children was because of intervention by lawyers, faith leaders, or other advocates.
  - Many workers who faced criminal charges were young mothers who faced bonds as high as \$18,000 and were often left no choice but to accept deportation and separation from their children. One mother who was ultimately deported went months without seeing her baby, who she had still been nursing at the time of the raid.
- **Harm to Children’s Mental and Physical Health:** Children experienced significant harm to their mental and physical health immediately after the raid and in the long term, including changes to their daily routines.
  - Given the dramatic nature of the raids, children who witnessed their parents’ arrests developed hernias and nose bleeds from uncontrolled sobbing.
  - Parents in OH and MS were held in detention facilities and jails located hours away from their homes, making it very difficult for them to communicate with or see their children.
  - Children across the sites exhibited signs of depression. In Mississippi, parents and faith leaders talked about how children would come home, throw their backpacks to the side, and sleep for the rest of the afternoon.
  - Older youth were taking on significant responsibilities--one 16 year old is planning on raising his siblings in case both his parents are deported.
- **Harm to Parents’ Mental and Physical Health:** Parents arrested in the raids and those left behind experienced adverse consequences to their mental and physical wellbeing, which were often exacerbated by related hardships and the need to provide emotional support for children.

- Workers were consistently degraded and treated inhumanely during the raid and while in detention. One woman was denied the ability to use the bathroom or clean herself for days, resulting in an infection.
- Many of the workers detained in the MS raid were mothers, meaning many fathers had to take on child care responsibilities of very young children. Nearly one third of all children arrested in the raids were between 4-8 years old, and a significant share were babies and toddlers.
- Many parents whose partner was detained were dealing with their own emotional pain and fear of being arrested by ICE as well--one father locked himself in his house for two weeks with his 3 young daughters.
- **Economic Hardship:** Families faced additional economic hardships as a result of the raids stemming from the sudden loss of income and difficulty finding employment.
  - Many were forced to rely on support from churches and community organizations to pay rent, utilities, and put food on the table.
  - Across the sites, parents struggled to find new employment.
  - In addition to loss of income, these families--who already had low incomes despite working long hours--also had to pull together money to help pay high bonds or pay to talk to loved ones in immigrant detention.
- **Stress on Providers and Community Leaders:** Providers and community leaders who stepped in to meet the short- and long-term needs of families often suffered harms to their own mental and physical health.
  - One mental health provider in MS--the only bilingual trauma specialist in the state--was so overwhelmed she suffered mental and physical health issues, including a stroke.
  - Churches had to take on new roles to support families--one church had to hire on a new staff person to help administer checks to families in need.

**Destroying families and harming children weakens society.** If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it's that we are all connected. My future depends on your well-being, and vice versa. The federal government's unnecessary, aggressive, and inhumane raids achieved its goal of dividing families, to the detriment of us all. The raids brought pain to children, introduced new and unnecessary stresses into their young lives, and challenged families to the breaking point. They devastated entire communities of people who simply desired to work and live a peaceful life. One mother said: "for children, what hurts you as a child, stays with you all your life." Research shows that to be true, and for this generation of children of immigrants, the trauma brought on by raids, a parent's arrest, and battling deportation is something they will deal with for the rest of their lives.

**Instead of arresting immigrant workers, our government should follow the lead of local communities and embrace the contributions of immigrants seeking a better life for their families and communities.** It is unfair to put children and families through this extreme stress, when parents' only objective has been to build a future for their children in a safe and stable country. An alternative and more hopeful vision for our future is represented in the remarkable resilience of the families impacted by the raids,

as well as the heroic community members who worked to support these families. Many parents we spoke to said “the reason we endure the suffering here is for our children. For them and their future, the sacrifice is worth it.”

This is an admirable statement, and one most people would agree with. We need to bring an end to the inhumane tactic of worksite raids, and value the lives of all people contributing to the United States, including their children.

Policy proposals:

- Stop worksite raids--more destructive than effective, and ensure all workers have universal protections
- Ensure all immigration enforcement actions have protocols in place to mitigate harm to children and that off agents who come into contact with a child have sensitivity training (example: humanitarian guidelines for worksite raids, parental interest directive, no enforcement at or near sensitive locations)
- Reduce ICE enforcement, stop prioritizing the detention and deportation of parents