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ALLIANCE

Afterthoughts: The Children of Deported Parents

Deportations fracture families and communities, leaving them forever changed, especially the children whose caregivers and parents are deported. Since 2011, over 400,000 parents of U.S. citizen children have been deported. Millions more children are at risk; 5.2 million children had at least one unauthorized immigrant parent, and 85 percent of these children (4.4 million) are U.S. citizens.

Policymakers must remedy the harm through policies that promote family unity and child well-being.

Institutions including the American Psychological Association, American Medical Association, and the Society for Research in Child Development, and others have emphasized how parental deportation has long-lasting, negative impacts on the well-being of children.

Children and young people from communities of color bear a higher burden of the costs of deportation, resulting from systemic racism, social inequality, and a punitive immigration enforcement system.

Deportations immediately endanger children.

Prior to 2016, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained and deported parents without regard for who would care for their children. In the aftermath of workplace immigration raids during the Trump Administration, local schools and churches stepped in to coordinate care. In a few cases, Child Protective Services (CPS) was unable to account for the safety of children impacted by the raids; many were unreachable following raids. While some policies have been enacted to safeguard the well-being of children and families impacted by immigration enforcement actions, their effectiveness varies depending on local oversight as well as presidential administration.



Deportation harms children's mental health and well-being.

Following the deportation of a parent, children experience difficulty sleeping, inability to connect with peers or siblings, psychological distress, depression, fear, low self-esteem, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Youth whose parents are detained or deported are uniquely at risk for increased suicidal thoughts, alcohol use, self-harm, acting out, and other behavioral problems, which can persist long-term. Notably, children's mental health is impacted regardless of whether the child stays in the U.S. or accompanies their parent to the country of deportation.

Deportation is associated with developmental delays.

Mental health issues are associated with a **range** of **negative physical health outcomes**, including **developmental delays or regressions**. This holds true for not only for children whose parents are deported, but also for those who have adults in their social networks deported; the more people a child's parents know who have been deported, **the more likely** the child has developmental delays or diagnoses. This is because parental stress trickles down to their children, which in turn, affects their healthy development. Moreover, deportation is tied to **housing instability** and an **increased likelihood of poverty**, both of which can have profound impacts on children's developmental health.



Deportation undermines families' financial stability.

The deportation or detention of a parent frequently **decreases household income**, reducing the resources available due to the loss of a breadwinner to pay for basic needs while adding costs due to the maintenance of two households. Families may become housing insecure, having to move or take in renters. The fear and trauma of deportation may cause families to **avoid seeking financial help** from the government for which they are eligible, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Medicaid benefits. One study estimates that deportation could decrease median household income in mixed-status families by 47 percent and **plunge millions into poverty**.



Deportation of parents worsens children's educational outcomes.

Children whose parents were deported may have trouble focusing on school or fear going to school, especially if their parents were detained during the school day. A parent's detention or deportation often results in **poor academic outcomes** like lower grades and decreased school attendance for the children left behind. Moreover, as a result of lower household income, older children may have to **drop out of school to work** and/or take on caregiving roles for younger siblings.



Recommendations

It is critical to our nation's future for immigration policy to prioritize family unity. In addition to recommendations contained in [Broken Hope: Deportation and the Road Home](#) and the National Immigrant Justice Center's [Chance to Come Home white paper](#), policymakers should:

1. Cosponsor bills that include a way for people who have been deported to return and reunite with their families and communities. These include:

- a) TPS for Mauritania Act, H.R. 7034 and S.3618
- b) New Way Forward Act, H.R. 2374
- c) Reuniting Families Act, H.R. 5560
- d) Dignity for Detained Immigrants, H.R. 2760, S.1208
- e) Fairness to Freedom Act, H.R. 2697
- f) Veteran Service Recognition Act, H.R. 4569
- g) Southeast Asian Deportation Relief Act, H.R. 5248
- h) Adoptee Citizenship Act, (2024 forthcoming)

2. Cosponsor bills that mitigate the harm of enforcement actions on children, such as the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act, H.R. 5166.

3. Support and advocate for administrative relief to prevent further deportations of undocumented community and family members.

4. Urge the administration to ensure ICE implements the [Detained Parents Directive](#), including procedures to identify parents of minor children and allowing for the return of a deported individual when their participation is required for parent rights hearings.