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Afterthoughts: The Children of Deported Parents

Deportations fracture families and communities, leaving them forever changed, [especially children](#) who lose a parent or caregiver. 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 in 2018. Eighty five 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](#) 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.

In previous years, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained and deported parents without regard for who would care for their children. Following workplace immigration raids under the [G.W. Bush](#) and [Trump](#) Administrations, 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. 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 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, affecting 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**. This is due to the loss of a breadwinner to pay for basic needs while also sometimes having to maintain 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 assistance** from the government for which they are eligible, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and Medicaid. 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 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 and resolutions that support actions for people who have been deported to return and reunite with their families and communities. These include:

- a) Chance to Come Home Resolution, S.Con.Res.39
- b) TPS for Mauritania Act, H.R. 7034 and S.3618
- c) New Way Forward Act, H.R. 2374
- d) Reuniting Families Act, H.R. 5560
- e) Dignity for Detained Immigrants, H.R. 2760, S.1208
- f) Fairness to Freedom Act, H.R. 2697
- g) Veteran Service Recognition Act, H.R. 4569
- h) Southeast Asian Deportation Relief Act, H.R. 5248
- i) Adoptee Citizenship Act, S.4448

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.