

NASW-FL Immigration Justice Task Force PROCLAMATION

Call to End Family Separation of Migrants and Forced Adoption of Migrant Children

Statements and articles have been written detailing the federal government's policy of separating migrant families at the border, the long-term negative psychological consequences of this practice, how some migrant children are being forced into adoption when their parents are deported or in detention even through backdoor channels, and how confidential therapy notes are being used against immigrant children.

- May 29, 2018 the American Psychological Association issued a [statement](#) against family separation of immigrant families.
- May 30, 2018 the National Association of Social Workers issued a [statement](#) against the federal policy of separating migrant families.
- June, 2018 Dr. Nadine Burke Harris [testified](#) before Congress about the impact on brain development of immigrant children separated from their parents.
- June 18, 2019 the Washington Post published an [article](#) on the negative psychological impacts of separating families.
- July 1, 2018 the Intercept published an [article](#) explaining how migrant children may be adopted against their parents' consent after being separated from their families at the border.
- February 2, 2019 the Associated Press [reported](#) that the federal government would not be able to reunite migrant families.
- October 9, 2019 the Associated Press published an [investigation](#) detailing this practice of family separation of migrants and children being forced into adoption.
- February 15, 2020 the Washington Post published an [article](#) about confidential therapy notes being used against immigrant children.
- February 25, 2020 the Guardian published an [article](#) stating that "The trauma Donald Trump's administration caused to young children and parents separated at the US-Mexico border constitutes torture, according to evaluations of 26 children and adults by the group Physicians for Human Rights (PHR)."

As members of the National Association of Social Workers – Florida Immigration Justice Task Force, we issue the following statement:

WHEREAS the current federal administration has carried out a policy of family separation of migrant families at the border,

WHEREAS family separation has been linked to long-term negative psychological impacts of children and is considered torture according to the evaluations of 26 children and adults by the group Physicians for Human Rights (PHR),

WHEREAS our core values, as described in the [Code of Ethics](#), highlight our commitment to *social justice* and *dignity and worth of the person*,

WHEREAS that we are bound in our Code of Ethics to the following:

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1. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to Clients

1.02 Self-Determination

Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals. Social workers may limit clients' right to self-determination when, in the social workers' professional judgment, clients' actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others.

3. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities in Practice Settings

3.09 Commitments to Employers

(c) Social workers should take reasonable steps to ensure that employers are aware of social workers' ethical obligations as set forth in the *NASW Code of Ethics* and of the implications of those obligations for social work practice.

(d) Social workers should not allow an employing organization's policies, procedures, regulations, or administrative orders to interfere with their ethical practice of social work. Social workers should take reasonable steps to ensure that their employing organization's practices are consistent with the *NASW Code of Ethics*.

5. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Social Work Profession

5.01 Integrity of the Profession

(a) Social workers should work toward the maintenance and promotion of high standards of practice.

(b) Social workers should uphold and advance the values, ethics, knowledge, and mission of the profession. Social workers should protect, enhance, and improve the integrity of the profession through appropriate study and research, active discussion, and responsible criticism of the profession.

6. Social Workers' Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society

6.01 Social Welfare

Social workers should promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and their environments. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.

6.04 Social and Political Action

(a) Social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice.

(b) Social workers should act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups.

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- (c) Social workers should promote conditions that encourage respect for cultural and social diversity within the United States and globally. Social workers should promote policies and practices that demonstrate respect for difference, support the expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, advocate for programs and institutions that demonstrate cultural competence, and promote policies that safeguard the rights of and confirm equity and social justice for all people.
- (d) Social workers should act to prevent and eliminate domination of, exploitation of, and discrimination against any person, group, or class on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical ability.

WHEREAS forced adoption of migrant children is contrary to our Code of Ethics stated above, as it is coercive (against Self-Determination), harmful to children and parents (against Integrity to the Profession and Social Welfare) and oppressive (against Social and Political Action) – in conflict with our core values, specifically *social justice* and *dignity and worth of the person*. It is unethical for social workers to engage in this practice, whether or not it is legal (its legality is unclear).

It is also critical to state that the United States government has a [long history of forced family separation/child removal](#) (state-sanctioned kidnapping) of [Indigenous](#) (U.S. Boarding Schools) and [Black](#) (slavery) families. The [current numbers](#) of Black, Native, and Brown children and families in the child welfare system are disproportionate and shows that racism continues to impact how Black, Indigenous, and People of Color families and children are treated by the government and social workers with regards to family preservation, separation, and/or reunification.

WE CALL on all social workers, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and its state chapters, and federal, state, and local governments to:

- 1) Immediately end the practices of family separation and the adoption of migrant children.
 - A) We call on social workers to refuse to engage in these practices.
 - B) We call on NASW to issue a statement that these practices are unethical.
 - C) We call on NASW to provide support and techniques through individual, group, and conference level learning for social workers to navigate their professions to advocate, provide direct action, and refuse to work in these inhumane and unethical workplaces.
 - D) We call on legislators to pass legislation banning these practices.
- 2) Investigate agencies engaging in these practices and hold them accountable. *During the interim process, we demand that these agencies respect the dignity and inherent worth of the people held in captivity by developing policies that protect their welfare in response to impending biological threats such as COVID-19 (“Coronavirus”).*

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3) Reunify migrant families: Social workers can be employed in reunification work. Stating that the government is not tracking these families is not a sufficient reason to not pursue reunification. The government inflicted this harm and must be held accountable.

4) Keep therapy notes confidential between therapist and client. Notes should not be allowed to be used against clients in court proceedings based [on client's right of privileged communication](#).

The social workers who developed this proclamation are aware that there are other issues that severely affect the wellbeing of our communities related to immigration policy. These other issues will be addressed separately in forthcoming proclamations.

Links:

- <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2018/05/separating-immigrant-families>
- <https://www.socialworkers.org/News/News-Releases/ID/1654/NASW-says-plan-to-separate-undocumented-immigrant-children-from-their-parents-is-malicious-and-unconscionable>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_KfxwXo1Oo
- https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/what-separation-from-parents-does-to-children-the-effect-is-catastrophic/2018/06/18/c00c30ec-732c-11e8-805c-4b67019fcfe4_story.html
- <https://theintercept.com/2018/07/01/separated-children-adoption-immigration/>
- https://apnews.com/48210bbf243e423ea151ff04e4878ce6?utm_medium=APWestRegion&utm_campaign=SocialFlow&utm_source=Twitter
- <https://apnews.com/97b06cede0c149c492bf25a48cb6c26f>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/immigration-therapy-reports-ic/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/feb/25/trump-family-separations-children-torture-psychology>
- <https://www.socialworkers.org/about/ethics/code-of-ethics/code-of-ethics-english>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/05/31/barbaric-americas-cruel-history-of-separating-children-from-their-parents/>
- <https://theintercept.com/2018/09/25/carlisle-indian-industrial-school-indigenous-children-disappeared/>
- <https://www.thedailybeast.com/weve-had-family-separation-before-it-was-called-slavery-and-jim-crow>
- https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/racial_disproportionality.pdf
- <https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/EoENovDec07.shtml>