



May 26, 2016

The Honorable John B. King, Jr.  
Secretary of Education  
400 Maryland Ave. S.W.  
Washington, DC 20202

The Honorable Jeh Johnson  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
800 K St. N.W. #1000  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary King and Secretary Johnson,

On behalf of the 1.6 million members of the American Federation of Teachers, we're deeply troubled by the increased enforcement measures targeting students and immigrant families from Central America. The increased policing and enforcement raids have had a chilling effect on our schools and immigrant communities, jeopardizing the safety and well-being of children and threatening the security and safety of entire communities. Several repeated reports of ICE raids in local communities detaining students on their way to and from school have been particularly damaging to the trust we've worked so hard to build as educators. Local community raids in North Carolina, Georgia and Texas have created a culture of widespread fear that has kept children away from schools. Targeting our students on their commute to and from school, or while they wait at their bus stop, is callous, damaging and counterproductive to our work as educators.

By law, public schools should be safe havens that embrace all students and families, regardless of citizenship and national origin, and that includes unaccompanied and refugee children. As educators, we have the responsibility to protect the educational rights of all children. We have worked hard to provide safe, welcoming places of learning, free from harassment and discrimination, where all our children feel safe, welcomed and valued, and are pushed to dream boldly. Our work does not stop when a child turns 18.

Central America is facing a humanitarian crisis. Specifically, the countries that make up the region's Northern Triangle—El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala—are three of the world's most violent countries, where rape, torture, murder, extortion, organized crime, human trafficking and aggressive gang recruitment have become commonplace.

American Federation  
of Teachers, AFL-CIO

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AFT Teachers  
AFT PSRP  
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The American Federation of Teachers is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

Because of this violence, thousands of unaccompanied children have fled the region. Their extraordinary journeys are rooted in a desire to seek asylum and reunite with family members in hopes of a better future in the United States.

While this crisis originates at our border, we all feel the impact in our classrooms, hospitals and communities. This is an issue that touches every division of our organization: preK-12 teachers, paraprofessionals and school-related personnel, public employees, healthcare professionals, and higher education faculty and staff. As the representative of those who teach and care for our next generation, the AFT strongly condemns the increased enforcement actions that have swept the country in recent months and calls for an immediate end to the ICE raids and to the detention and deportation of children seeking asylum in the United States. No parents should see their child handcuffed and dragged into an unmarked car, feeling powerless because they too fear being questioned, detained and deported, which has been the case in recent community raids.

As educators, we know that circumstances outside the school have a huge impact on the educational success of students. We see it in our students' homework assignments, interactions in class and grades. Chronic fear, anxiety and stress are consuming them. Recent raids serve as a constant reminder for students in similar situations that they or their loved ones run the risk of being picked up by ICE. And we know we're not alone in this; social workers and health experts share similar concerns about the health and well-being of students.

The *Los Angeles Times* has reported that of the more than 18,600 Central American families who have received deportation notices, 85 percent of them didn't have attorneys. And worse, more than 7,000 unaccompanied children were ordered for deportation without ever appearing in court. We can and must do better to ensure children receive the proper screening, support and legal guidance to make asylum claims before a judge. Studies show that 9 out of 10 unaccompanied minors who navigate the system without an attorney are deported, while those who do have counsel are five times more likely to be granted protection. Barriers to legal counsel should not determine whether an individual, and especially a child, lives in peace or in fear for his or her life. Not giving children access to legal representation can result in death by deportation.

And we can't forget about the impact deportations are having on U.S.-born children. About 4.1 million U.S.-born children of immigrants live in mixed status households with at least one parent who is undocumented. Raids and deportations are terrifying and marginalizing innocent kids. There is a generation of children that has grown up living with chronic fear and other post-traumatic stress disorders. Raids take an emotional, psychological and physical toll on developing children.

On March 23 of this year, the AFT co-hosted a congressional briefing, along with First Focus, Kids in Need of Defense, the National Immigration Law Center and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, to shed light on the impact ICE raids and deportations are having on U.S.-born children, unaccompanied children and families. Panelists at the briefing called for several policy changes to address the crisis, including:

- Developing foreign policies to address the root causes of the migration: organized crime, violence, human trafficking, gangs, poverty and persecution.
- Closing the failing detention facilities.
- Ending “rocket docket” (accelerated hearings) and deportations of children enrolled in school.
- Granting prosecutorial discretion to all the students picked up by recent immigration raids and allowing them an opportunity to reopen their asylum claims.
- Passing the Fair Day in Court for Kids Act, introduced by Reps. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-Calif.) and Luis Gutierrez (D-Ill.), and a companion bill introduced by Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.), to ensure access to counsel and other services for children and others in immigration proceedings.
- Producing better data on where unaccompanied children are settling so advocates can better address their needs.
- Coordinating among federal agencies and with multistate agencies and diverse stakeholders to create safe learning environments and communities.
- Investing in bilingual education, counseling and wraparound services to help these vulnerable children succeed in school, instead of increased enforcement measures.
- Making sure educators, school support staff and community partners are equipped with the resources and guidance they need to be successful in addressing the myriad issues impacting unaccompanied children, given the challenging circumstances they face, instead of placing children in harm’s way or disrupting the education and trust we have built as educators.

Additionally, we demand an investigation into the practices being used to target these children in “sensitive locations.” How do field agents know the age of the individuals they are targeting? We must end the detention of our students, who are being denied their right to a public education as affirmed by *Plyler v. Doe*, and call for an immediate investigation into the education that is provided to students in detention centers. We must recognize that detention centers are not and will never be replacements for public schools.

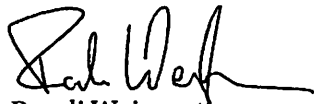
We implore you to work together as well as with other federal agencies in order to put the safety and well-being of children first and ensure that their health, educational, safety and legal needs are being met. We would really welcome an opportunity to meet

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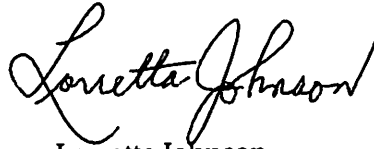
with both of you, along with our community partners, to discuss these concerns in person. A member of our staff will be in touch to follow up on this request.

Thank you for considering our views on this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Randi Weingarten  
President



Lorretta Johnson  
Secretary-Treasurer



Mary Cathryn Ricker  
Executive Vice President

MCR: mmk

Miss M. J. ...

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