

California State PTA Statement on Family Separation and the U.S. Administration's "Zero Tolerance" Immigration Policy

"The National Congress of Mothers, irrespective of creed, color or condition, stands for all parenthood, childhood, homehood."

– Alice McLellan Birney, 1898, Cofounder of National PTA



SACRAMENTO, CA – According to a spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security on Friday, June 15, the U.S. has separated 1,995 children from 1,940 adults at the border between April 19 and May 31. That is approximately 46 children per day, over a six-week period. As reported by the *New York Times*, there were more than 100 children under the age of four separated from their parents at the southwest border in April.

The administration's "zero tolerance" policy, announced by the Department of Justice in April, calls for the prosecution of every person who crosses the border unlawfully, including many families seeking asylum from violence and persecution in their homelands.

There is no law that says children must be taken from their parents if they cross the border unlawfully, and previous administrations have made exceptions for those traveling with minor children when prosecuting immigrants for illegal entry. A "zero tolerance" policy created by the president in April and put into effect last month by Attorney General Jeff Sessions allows no such exceptions.

Defending the administration's "zero tolerance" policy, Sessions stated, "If people don't want to be separated from their children, they should not bring them with them."

California State PTA believes that the new "zero tolerance" policy implemented by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of Justice must be halted. This immigration policy is tearing families apart, separating children from their parents and forcing them into vulnerable situations when there is no federal mandate to do so. This is cruel and inhumane.

California State PTA believes it is important to ensure the rights of children and parents are respected. This includes the right to remain together as a family unit.

California State PTA believes that it is in the national interest to ensure that all children, including undocumented children, have the opportunity to reach their full potential and become productive members of society. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics in its statement opposing the "zero tolerance" policy, "Highly stressful experiences, like family separation, can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress – known as toxic stress – can carry lifelong consequences for children."

Eleanor Roosevelt helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on behalf of the United States. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1948 and calls on all member nations to follow basic human rights.

- **Article 5.** No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- **Article 14.** Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
- **Article 16. (3)** The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.
- **Article 25. (2)** Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

These basic human rights are being violated within the United States by the treatment of families through this "zero tolerance" policy.

California State PTA calls on the U.S. Administration to stop the separation of children from their parents and families at the border. This cruel policy is unnecessary and unacceptable, particularly in a country like the United States that is a champion for human rights around the world. This policy will have long term effects on children separated from their parents, and it is reminiscent of other national policies of the past that have left a dark stain on our nation. The "zero tolerance" immigration policy and separation of families must end.

Take Action:

"California PTA has been standing up for children and families who may not be able to speak for themselves for more than 121 years. We will continue to fight for our children to ensure that that our nation does not undermine the basic needs of those who seek safety. California State PTA believes that federal, state and local entities have a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of children by offering health care and other social services needed in their areas. Denying these services to children, regardless of their citizenship status, can endanger communities and create serious health and social concerns," said California State PTA President Dianna MacDonald

We urge our members to call the Justice Department at 202-353-1555 and tell Attorney General Jeff Session to keep families together and to end this attack on children and families.

About California State PTA

California State PTA connects families, schools and communities. We are part of the foundation of our public-education system and a trusted messenger to millions of members, parents, families, educators and allied agencies throughout the state. PTA is the nation's largest volunteer-led child-advocacy association working to drive improvements in the education, health and well-being of all children and families. For more information: www.capta.org.