

# Illinois Early Learning Council

## **Statement of the Illinois Early Learning Council on Family Separation**

The Illinois Early Learning Council serves as the voice for early childhood development in Illinois. We work to create early opportunities for children to learn and develop optimally because we recognize the critical importance of the first five years of a child's life. We know that during the early years stable, nurturing relationships with familiar caregivers are necessary for brain development. And we know that disruption of those relationships causes long term damage to children that affects their ability to learn, their mental health, and their ability to function successfully in life. We also believe that all children have a right to be protected and supported, regardless of their national origin.

Since early May, the Department of Homeland Security in collaboration with the Department of Justice has implemented a "Zero Tolerance" policy which routinely separates immigrant children from their parents and families. Reports have documented that these families are fleeing persecution and violence in their countries and come here seeking protection. After long and harrowing journeys, these parents may be placed in adult immigration detention centers and/or summarily deported while their children are transferred to the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services in facilities across the country. These children are severely traumatized by these separations.

The Illinois Early Learning Council condemns this policy of "Zero Tolerance" and the practice of separating vulnerable children from their parents, traumatizing them severely. We request that this policy immediately be rescinded. We also must speak in opposition to the Executive Order that was issued on June 20, 2018 to end family separation at the border as it includes no plan for reunification of the over 2,000 traumatized children who have already been separated from their families and are currently being shipped all across the country. We oppose family separation and the trauma it unnecessarily inflicts on children at this critical time in their development.