August 10, 2017

Elaine Duke
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Duke:

The undersigned 377 national, state, and local organizations write today to urge you to direct Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to cease its "surge initiative" that targets for detention, deportation, and potential criminal prosecution vulnerable children and their sponsors seeking protection at our borders. Our organizations have longstanding experience and expertise in advocating on behalf of immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees—including unaccompanied children—and we are deeply concerned over the impact that these enforcement actions will have on the well-being of families and communities across the United States and the ability of children to safely and humanely access protection.

While the stated purpose of this new initiative is to disrupt human smuggling networks, we are alarmed by its tactics and fear that these actions will have the opposite effect. Children and others fleeing violence and harm will find themselves trapped between a life-threatening situation in their home country and a precarious route to safety. Whether families are involved in children's decisions to flee or a child decides on his or her own, the decision to flee is not one that is made lightly, but rather because the security and protection systems in their own countries have failed to protect children from harm. Rather than disrupting smuggling operations, we fear these new enforcement tactics will embolden criminal actors, who will subject children whose only choice is to flee to even more costly, dangerous, and hidden routes. Ultimately, an initiative targeting smugglers and smuggling networks should do just that—not prosecute and punish parents for trying to save their children's lives.

This initiative—like other actions recently reported targeting families and youth—will further devastate communities across the United States, where fear of immigration enforcement has already reduced engagement with local police and the reporting of crimes, including domestic violence and sexual assault. Many of the families being targeted in the surge initiative also have U.S. citizen children in their household who are at risk of being left without a parent to care for them. These children may become dependent on child welfare or other social service agencies, creating an unnecessary and costly burden on localities and states. Tearing apart families will be deeply traumatizing for all family members involved and have lasting effects on them and their communities. To separate–perhaps forever–children from their parents flies in the face of our values and does nothing to increase our national security or public safety.

This new initiative will also result in costly and inhumane detention, both of parents who are being sent to immigration detention to await a hearing or removal, and of unaccompanied children who may remain in custody for prolonged periods of time with no prospect of family reunification. These prolonged detentions will not only have an emotional toll on children, they will have procedural and financial costs as well. Children who cannot be reunified with parents will navigate their legal protection case from Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody, instead of from the community, where their sponsors assume all costs for their care. Detention also results in reduced access to legal counsel and, often for children, a more drawn out court proceeding that a child is not equipped to navigate.

Lastly, this enforcement initiative contravenes our most foundational child welfare principles. Family unity is a fundamental right in all fifty states. Child welfare practice is predicated on the assumption that it is in the best interest of children to be with their families and out of institutionalized care. Threatening, detaining, and deporting parents and other sponsors will have a chilling effect on families and will leave highly traumatized children without the familial care and support they need during a time when they are in the midst of legal proceedings on which their safety, and even their lives, can depend. Further, as previously stated, your agency's actions carry collateral consequences for U.S. citizen children. This enforcement initiative is an inappropriate use of programs and services intended to protect children, and threatens the very integrity of our child protection principles and system.

Your predecessor well knew the extent of the insecurity and instability many of these children and their relatives have fled in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) along with numerous other organizations have repeatedly documented the refugee crisis caused by conditions in the region and have called for the United States and regional partners to respond with protection, not misguided attempts at deterrence. The Central American Minors (CAM) program offers children a legal path to protection in the United States while still in their home countries so that they may avoid perilous journeys to safety. We urge you to prioritize and expand this critical tool, which promises to better protect children from those who might do them harm than traumatic and ineffective enforcement tactics.

The agency's recent enforcement actions against immigrant families and youth without criminal history as part of efforts to combat gang violence similarly undermine the stability and safety of our communities. We call on you to end these enforcement actions—and the larger "surge initiative"—immediately, and welcome the opportunity for further discussion on how to best disrupt criminal networks while ensuring that children and families have access to safety and a fair and just legal process.

Sincerely,

National Organizations
Adjunct Justice
African American Ministers In Action (AAMIA)
Alianza Americas
America's Voice Education Fund
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA)
American Psychological Association
American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Anti-Defamation League
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (APALA)
Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence
Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO)
Campaign for Youth Justice

Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities
Catholic Committee of the South
Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.
Center for American Progress
Center for Employment Training
Center for Gender & Refugee Studies
Center for Law and Social Policy
Central Pastoral Office for Hispanic Ministries- Disciples of Christ
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Refugee & Immigration Ministries
Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Coalition on Human Needs
CODEPINK
Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)
Community Initiatives for Visiting Immigrants in Confinement (CIVIC)
Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, US Provinces
Desert Southwest Conference UMC
Disciples Home Missions
Disciples Immigration Legal Counsel
Disciples Women
Enlace
Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement
Family Network on Disabilities
Farmworker Justice
First Focus
Food Empowerment Project
Freedom Network USA
Fuerza Mundial
Futures Without Violence
Global Community in Action
Grassroots Leadership
HIAS
Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, USA - JPIC
Immigrant Legal Resource Center
Indivisible
Interfaith Worker Justice
International Rescue Committee
InterReligious Task Force On Central America and Colombia
Justice Strategies
Kids in Need of Defense
Lambda Legal
Laotian American National Conference
Latin America and Caribbean Office-Global Ministries
Latin America Working Group Education Fund
Latino Victory Project
LatinoJustice PRLDEF
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
League of United Latin American Citizens
Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
Mi Familia Vota
NAACP
NAKASEC (National Korean American Service & Education Consortium)
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
National Council of Jewish Women
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
National Latina/o Psychological Association
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
Nicaragua Center for Community Action
North Bay Jobs with Justice
Our Revolution
Oxfam
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Pro Bono Net
Provincial Council Clerics of St. Viator (Viatorians)
Redwood Justice Fund
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES)
School Social Work Association of America
Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
Sisters of Charity, BVM
Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, New Windsor, NY
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
Southern Poverty Law Center
T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights
Tahirih Justice Center
Teaching for Change
The Hampton Institute : A working class think tank
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
The United Methodist Church - General Board of Church and Society
U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
UnidosUS (formerly NCLR)
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
University Leadership Initiative
WOLA
Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights
Women’s Refugee Commission

State and Local Organizations
"Madre Tierra" Latino Women organization

AB 540 Ally Training Project
ACLAMO Family Centers
ACTIONN
Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, Inc.
Advocates for Children and Youth
African Services Committee
AFSC Colorado
AFSC Iowa
Ajo Samaritans
Alianza
Allies of Knoxville's Immigrant Neighbors (AKIN)
American Friends Service Committee- Arizona
Apostle Immigrant Services
Arkansas Justice Collective
Arkansas United Community Coalition
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Atlanta
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA
Asian Americans United
Asian Law Alliance
Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach
Association for Special Children & Families
Asylee Women Enterprise
Asylum Seekers Housing Network (ASHN)
Atlas: DIY
Ayuda
Bethany Immigration Services
Border Action Network
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
Brockport Ecumenical Outreach Committee
Cabrini Immigrant Services of NYC
Campaign for Hoosier Families
Capital Area Immigrants' Rights Coalition
CASA
Casa Latina
Catholic Agency for Migration & Refugee Services
Catholic Charities of Jackson, Mississippi - Migrant Support Center
Catholic Charities of Springdale
Catholic Charities of the East Bay
Catholic Charities of Trenton
Catholic Charities of West Tennessee
Catholic Charities Tompkins/Tioga
Causa Oregon
Central American Resource Center
Central Valley Immigrant Integration Collaborative (CVIIC)
Centro Del Inmigrante, Inc.
Centro Laboral de Graton
Centro Legal de la Raza
Centro Romero

Change Agency
Chicago Law and Education Foundation
Chicano Federation of San Diego County
Children's Law Center of Massachusetts
Church of Our Saviour/La Iglesia de Nuestro Salvador, Episcopal
Church Women United in New York State
Cleveland Jobs with Justice
CLUE Ventura County
Coalicion de Derechos Humanos
Coalicion de Lidetes Latinos, CLILA
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition
Comite Civico del Valle
Communities in Schools of Los Angeles
Community Action Committee of Cape Cod & Islands
Community of Friends in Action, Inc.
Congress of Day Laborers
Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.
Connecticut Students for a Dream
Courage Campaign
CRLA Foundation
Crossing Borders - Dubuque
CT Working Families
CWS-Lancaster (PA)
Danbury Justice Network
DC Latino Caucus
DC-Maryland Justice for Our Neighbors
Detained Migrant Solidarity Committee
Dolores Street Community Services
Dominican Sisters in Committed Collaboration (Amityville, Blauvelt, Caldwell, Hope Sparkill)
Dream Team Los Angeles - DTLA
East Bay Sanctuary Covenant
Eastern Iowa Community Bond Project
El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos
El Monte Wesleyan Christian Church
El Rescate
Encuentro
End Domestic Abuse WI
English Ministry of the Korean Presbyterian Church of St. Louis
Equal Justice Center
Equality California
Erie Neighborhood House
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Advocacy Office
Evanston Interfaith Refugee Roundtable
Evanston Scholars
Fe y Justicia Worker Center
First Friends of NJ AND NY
Florida Immigrant Coalition

Franciscan Peace Center
Friends of Broward Detainees
Friends of Miami-Dade Detainees
Fuerza Latina
Future Arizona Justice for our Neighbors
Greater New York Labor Religion Coalition
Greater Rochester Coalition for Immigration Justice
Ground Game LA
Grupo de Apoyo e Integración Hispanoamericano
Guatemala Acupuncture and Medical Aid Project
Hana Center
Her Justice
Holy Cross Ministerio Hispano
Hudson Civic Action
Human Agenda
Human Rights Initiative of North Texas
Iglesia Alas de Salvacion
Iglesia Nueva Creación
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Immanuel Fellowship: a MultiCultural Congregation
Immigrant Connection at National Wesleyan Church
Immigrant Defenders Law Center
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
Immigrant Legal Center of Boulder County
Immigrant Youth Coalition
Immigration Center for Women and Children
Immigration Center of San Bernardino, Inc.
Immigration Counseling Service (ICS)
Immigration Issues Committee of Herndon-Reston Indivisible
Immigration Project, Inc.
Immigration Unlimited, Inc.
Indivisible 4 Immigration
Indivisible Alta-Pasadena
Inland Coalition for Immigrant Justice
Inland Empire Immigrant Youth Collective (IEIYC)
Interfaith Alliance for Immigrant Justice
Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants
Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice - IMIrJ
International Institute of Buffalo
International Institute of the Bay Area
Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Irish International Immigrant Center
Jewish Family Service of San Diego
Just Neighbors Ministry
Justice for All
Justice for our Neighbors Houston
Justice For Our Neighbors Southeastern Michigan

Justice For Our Neighbors West Michigan
Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
Kids for College
Kino Border Initiative
Korean Presbyterian Church of St Louis English Ministry
Korean Resource Center
La Casa de Amistad
La Raza Centro Legal
La Union Hace La Fuerza
Lacey and Larkin Frontera Fund
Lafayette Urban Ministry
Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund
Legal Aid Society of San Mateo County
Legal Services for Children
Lemkin House
Long Island Wins
Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM
Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry New Jersey
Lutheran Social Services of New York
Macomb Immigrant Service Center
Make the Road NY
March and Rally LA
Masa
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Michigan Coalition to End Domestic & Sexual Violence
Michigan Immigrant Rights Center
Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project
Migrant Rights Collective
Mission Graduates
Mixteco/Indigena Community Organizing Project
Montgomery County Education Forum
Morristown Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Mujeres Inmigrantes Luchando Unidas (MILU)
Mujeres Unidas y Activas
National Lawyers Guild - Los Angeles Chapter
NC Child
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice
New Mexico Voices for Children
New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice
New York Justice For Our Neighbors
NH Conference UCC Immigration Working Group
NM Immigrant Law Center
North Carolina Council of Churches
North Carolina Justice Center
North County Immigration Task Force
Northeast Justice Center

Northern Illinois Justice for Our Neighbors
Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
Oakland Law Collaborative
Occupy Bergen County (New Jersey)
OneAmerica
OutFront Minnesota
Pangea Legal Services
Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center
PASO - West Suburban Action Project
Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition
Pittsburgh LCLAA
Portland Central America Solidarity Committee
Project for Law Enforcement Accountability for Justice
Project IRENE
Promesa Boyle Heights
Promise Arizona
Proyecto Santo Nino de Atocha
Public Counsel
Public Law Center
Reformed Church of Highland Park
Refugio del Rio Grande
Rhode Island Parent Information Network
Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network
Rural and Migrant Ministry
Safe Passage
San Diego Volunteer Lawyer Program, Inc.
Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants, Inc.
Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul of New York
Sisters of St. Francis
Sisters of St. Francis, St. Francis Province
Skagit Immigrant Rights Council
Social Justice Collaborative
South Asian Fund For Education, Scholarship and Training (SAFEST)
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network
Southwest Detroit Immigrant and Refugee Center
St John of God
St Joseph Valley Project Jobs with Justice
St. Mark's Presbyterian Church
St. Michael and All Angels Episcopal Church Social Action Committee
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of NJ (SPAN)
SWOP - Southwest Organizing Project
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
Texans Care for Children
The Church of the Village, NYC
The Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc.
The Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project

The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ
The Green Valley/Sahuarita Samaritans
Trinity Episcopal Church
U-Lead Athens
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of NJ
Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative Advocacy Network (UUPLAN)
University of San Francisco Immigration and Deportation Defense Clinic
University of Tulsa Legal Clinic
UnLocal, Inc.
UpValley Family Centers of Napa County
Urban Justice Center
UUPLAN Immigration Justice
Voices for Children in Nebraska
Voices for Children of San Antonio
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights
Wayne Action for Racial Equality
WeCount!
Welcoming Gainesville and Alachua County
Wilco Justice Alliance (Williamson County, TX)
Wind of the Spirit Immigrant Resource Center, Inc.
Women Against War
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Portland Branch
Workers Defense Project
Wyoming Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
YWCA Kalamazoo