



PRESS RELEASE
October 24, 2019

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U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report:

Trauma at the Border: The Human Cost of Inhumane Immigration Policies

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released its [report](#), *Trauma at the Border: The Human Cost of Inhumane Immigration Policies*. The report highlights testimony received from asylum seekers, legal experts, and other witnesses to the impacts of changes in immigration policy at the southern border. The report focuses on the separation of thousands of migrant children from their parents, and the housing and medical care provided to asylum seekers and other immigrants while detained.

The report concludes that the impact of separating immigrant families and indefinite detention is widespread, long-term, and may inflict irreversible physical, mental and emotional trauma. Despite an Executive Order purporting to stop family separation, there remain credible allegations that family separations continue. The Commission also heard directly from immigrant detainees who confirmed traumatic experiences as a result of enduring inhumane conditions at detention facilities and cruel treatment by Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel.

“The institution of the Zero Tolerance policy and decision to forcibly and deliberately separate children, including infants and toddlers, from parents or adult family members on a mass scale, which proceeded with no plans or coordination to reunite families, is a gross human and civil rights violation,” said **Vice-Chair Patricia Timmons-Goodson**. “The Administration should use its authority to immediately alleviate the disturbing conditions addressed in our report, and Congress should pass multi-faceted legislation to ensure that this crisis is resolved as soon as possible, and prevented from ever happening again.”

In addition, the new testimony and data indicate that federal agencies have not heeded the Commission’s recommendations from its 2015 [report](#), *With Liberty and Justice for All*. Agencies continue to not provide appropriate and critical legal and medical services to detainees, or transparency about the government’s policies in detaining individuals.

The Commission found that today’s detention conditions have deteriorated under the Administration’s policies. Some child detention facilities lack basic hygiene and sleeping arrangements; they sometimes lack soap, blankets, dental hygiene, potable water, clean clothing, and nutritious food. The Commission heard testimony that child detention facilities lack appropriately trained medical personnel and medicine, medical staff are not routinely present at detention facilities, and wait times to see a doctor can be weeks long, regardless of how dire the situation. Language barriers further pose an immense hurdle to staff’s ability to offer adequate and appropriate medical and mental health treatment.

Further, these policies disparately impact people of color, particularly Latinos, and agencies continue inequitable treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals, individuals with disabilities, and non-English speakers.

The Commission majority voted for **key recommendations**, including the following: the Administration must immediately reunify separated children with their caregivers, including those who were deported before, during, and after Zero Tolerance, unless there is a proven risk of abuse or neglect.

The Administration should immediately remedy conditions in detention centers regarding overcrowding, food, and sanitation, so as not to further traumatize children forced to flee their homes. Mental and physical health needs must be provided, including access to medical professionals with translation services. To avoid these conditions going forward, Congress must pass legislation that sets safe, sanitary and humane detention conditions, and provide sufficient funding to address the crisis in detention facilities for children and adults. Because the purpose of immigration detention is not punitive, the standard for care and housing should be based on providing reasonable care and safety, and not on incarceration standards.

The Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services should conduct greater oversight and inspection of detention centers, especially those where children are housed. The Departments should close detention centers that violate applicable standards and laws. Congress should also expand the authority of DHS' Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) to remedy conditions in response to complainants about detention. New immigration policies should be precleared by CRCL or another independent body to ensure they do not violate civil rights, *prior* to causing harm.

In order to assure due process for all asylum seekers and other immigrants, Congress must address the need for hiring, full training, and retention of qualified administrative law judges, and interpreters. Translation services should be provided in detention facilities to increase communication and provide equal access to legal information and representation. Access to immigration lawyers should be significantly expanded.

[Trauma at the Border](#), based on expert and public input, and research and analysis, offers actionable recommendations to the President, Congress, and federal agencies. In April 2019, the Commission held a [public comment session](#), hearing from advocates, legal experts, and affected persons. The Commission also received 280 written public comments. We invite you to see the video of the [session](#) and its [transcript](#). The report is the culmination of the work of the Commission's subcommittee formed to lead this assessment, chaired by **Commissioner Michael Yaki**.

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