



Congress Must Act to Protect Children and Families Impacted by Interior Immigration Enforcement

The Trump Administration's attacks on immigrant families have been far-reaching, from limiting access to critical health care and nutrition programs to increased immigration enforcement that separates families. These policies, including the return of massive worksite immigration raids, have undermined the well-being of millions of children in immigrant families, the vast majority of whom are U.S. citizens.

In August 2019, a worksite raid in Mississippi—the largest single-state operation in U.S. history—garnered national attention when nearly 700 workers were arrested and separated from their families. News coverage showed many children left at school with no one to pick them up because their parents had been arrested in the raids that day, and highlighted the public outcry from the community in support of workers and their families.

The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) published a report, *The Day that ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families*, based on visits to three locations that experienced worksite raids during the Trump administration—Allen, Texas; Salem and Sandusky, Ohio; and Canton, Carthage, Forest, and Morton, Mississippi. Notably, each of these raids represented the largest worksite raid in more than a decade at the time they occurred. Researchers met with immigrants and their families, lawyers, educators, community responders, and faith leaders to document the impact of recent worksite raids on children, families, and communities.

Key Study Findings:

- **Family Separation:** Families experienced separation ranging from several hours to months, including long-term separation due to the deportation of a parent.
- **Harm to Children's Mental and Physical Health:** Children experienced significant harm to their mental and physical health immediately after the raid and in the long term, including changes to their daily routines.
- **Harm to Parents' Mental and Physical Health:** Parents arrested in the raids and those left behind experienced adverse consequences to their mental and physical wellbeing, which were often exacerbated by related hardships and the need to provide emotional support for children.
- **Economic Hardship:** Families faced additional economic hardships as a result of the raids stemming from the sudden loss of income and difficulty finding employment.
- **Stress on Providers and Community Leaders:** Providers and community leaders working directly with immigrant families affected by the raids had to quickly organize and shift their priorities to meet the short- and long-term needs of families, often with consequences for their own mental and physical health.

Recommendations for Congress

If our country continues down a path of harsh enforcement-only immigration policies and disregards the safety and long-term wellbeing of millions of children in immigrant families across the country, we as a nation will ultimately pay the price. These problems are even starker in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, where immigrant families are disproportionately represented among essential workers who are at higher risk for contracting the virus, as well as being unemployed at higher rates than U.S. citizens, despite having fewer resources to support their families during unemployment.



Congress should ensure that the best interests of children are held paramount in immigration policy decisions by ending harmful interior immigration enforcement, such as worksite raids. Rather than undermine the healthy development of children through policies that separate them from their family or prevent them from having their basic needs met, it is critical that policymakers reverse course to advance policies that address the significant harm already inflicted upon our nation's children and help them thrive.

Specifically, Congress should:

Stop funding harmful Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement actions, including worksite raids. Any Department of Homeland Security funding should include specific guardrails to hold ICE accountable and minimize the harm to communities, including the prioritization of alternatives to detention programs.

Pass legislation codifying and expanding humanitarian guidelines when ICE conducts worksite enforcement operations. Guidelines should include timely screening and identification of parents of minor children, pregnant women, and other individuals with humanitarian concerns for release, and require ICE to notify local schools and social service agencies in advance of operations.

Protect the parental rights of immigrants who are detained or deported and mitigate the harm of interior immigration enforcement actions on children. Congress should pass the Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections (HELP) for Separated Children Act (H.R. 3451) and the Coordinating Care for Children Affected by Immigration Enforcement Act (S.2256), both which would create standards for ICE to help reduce the trauma children face when their parents are taken into custody, and ensure parents are able to make decisions regarding the care of their children at the time of apprehension and after detention and deportation. Another relevant bill, the Help Separated Families Act (H.R. 3452), would ensure that the child welfare system has protocols in place so that system-involved children are able to reunify with their detained or deported parents.

Strengthen and expand current policy restricting immigration enforcement at or near sensitive locations. Congress should pass the Protecting Sensitive Locations Act (S.2097/H.R. 1011), which would codify and strengthen existing ICE and Customs and Border Patrol policy by prohibiting immigration enforcement activities within 1,000 feet of sensitive locations such as health care facilities, child care and early education programs, schools, places of worship, courthouses, and other locations where families access public assistance.

Protect and empower immigrant workers. Congress can pass the Support the Protecting Our Workers from Exploitation and Retaliation (POWER) Act (S.2929/H.R. 5225), which would establish protections that allow immigrant workers to speak out against unfair working conditions without fear of retaliation. The legislation would also strengthen the U.S. Department of Labor's ability to conduct oversight on employers that mistreat and retaliate against immigrant workers. Undocumented workers are particularly vulnerable to retaliation and subject to unsafe and unfair work environments as a result.

For questions regarding these recommendations, please contact **Juan Gomez** at jgomez@clasp.org.

The Day that ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families is available at <https://www.clasp.org/the-day-ice-came>.