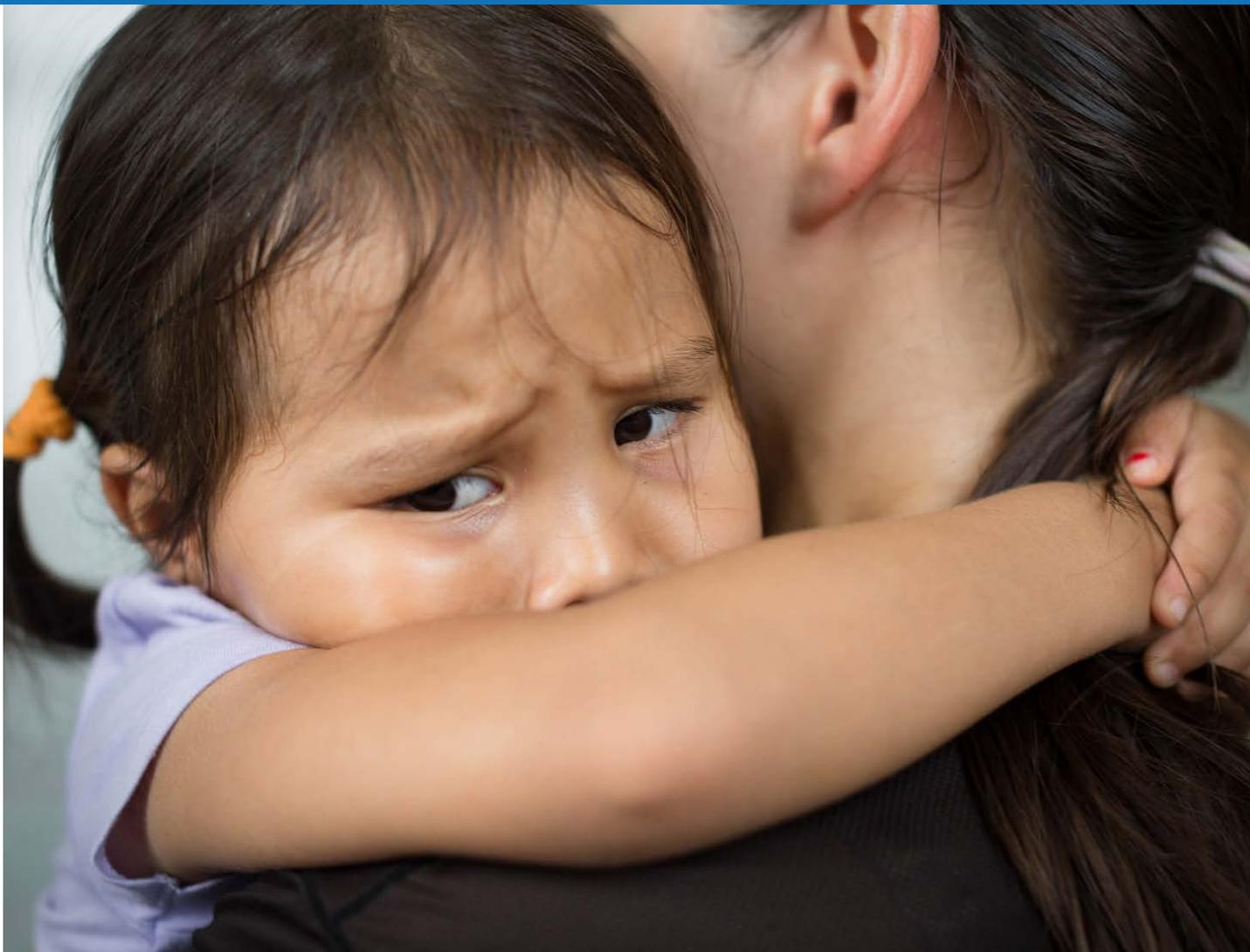


# CLASP

Policy solutions that work for low-income people



## **The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families**

*By Wendy Cervantes, Rebecca Ullrich, and Vanessa Meraz*



## Introduction

As a nation, we value hard work and believe that all children deserve the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Immigrants have played a critical role in our workforce throughout history, and children of immigrants now comprise one in four of all children in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Yet, hardworking immigrants continue to be humiliated and punished due to an unjust system that relies on and often exploits their labor. Their children, the majority of whom are U.S. citizens, are forced to suffer the long-term harmful consequences of harsh immigration policy decisions that are often politically motivated.<sup>2</sup>

Recent efforts to ramp up immigration enforcement in the interior of the United States and drastic changes in enforcement policies—such as making parents of U.S. citizen children priorities for deportation—have made families across the country increasingly vulnerable to being separated. The reemergence of worksite raids is an example of the Trump Administration’s enforcement-heavy approach to immigration policy that harms not only the workers targeted, but also their families and communities. Previous research on worksite enforcement clearly documents the short- and long-term harms to children’s physical and mental health as well as the strain on local communities attempting to respond to families’ immediate and long-term needs.<sup>3</sup> Public outcry against massive worksite raids under the George W. Bush Administration led to the creation of “humanitarian guidelines” to better protect children and other individuals impacted by worksite actions. The practice of large-scale worksite enforcement largely came to an end under the Obama Administration.

Shortly after President Trump took office, officials in his administration ordered the reinstatement of worksite raids, which they have conducted more frequently and in larger scale over time.<sup>4</sup> In the summer of 2018, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) carried out multiple raids, including large-scale operations that each had more than 100 arrests. A series of raids on poultry processing plants in Mississippi in August 2019—resulting in the arrest of nearly 700 workers and affecting more than one thousand children—remains the largest single-state worksite operation in U.S. history. The national scope of these raids, their unpredictable nature, and the excessive force with which they have been carried out has raised concerns once again about the high human cost of such operations.



## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

Building on research conducted in 2017,<sup>5</sup> the Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) conducted a series of site visits in 2019 to document the impact of recent worksite raids on children, families, and communities. It is important to note that the devastating impacts of the worksite raids covered in this study represent yet another insurmountable hurdle for children and families already affected by the stresses of poverty, increased anti-immigrant discrimination, and constantly changing immigration policies.

Across all the sites, a common theme was the excessive use of force and the highly dramatic nature of the operations. The workers arrested in the raids were often mothers and fathers—many of whom had lived in the community for decades, rarely missed a day of work, and had no criminal record. Workers and community members alike expressed difficulty understanding the logic behind the choice to arrest workers in such an aggressive, public manner. Many immigrants talked about the large number of agents, often at least one per worker, the use of helicopters, and such physical and verbal aggression as pushing and yelling while handcuffing and transporting workers. In Mississippi, several providers and community members likened the raid to a terrorist attack.

The findings in this report and in previous studies are clear on the serious implications for our country's collective future: if we continue down a path of harsh enforcement-only immigration policies and disregard 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. Rather than undermine the healthy development of children of immigrants through policies that separate them from their parents 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.

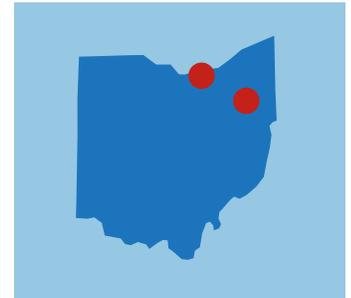
### Key findings include:

- **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.

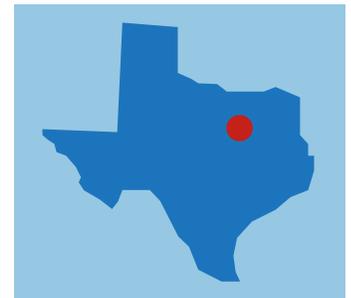
### Overview of study

From August to December 2019, CLASP conducted three site visits in communities that have experienced large-scale worksite raids since January 2017. In each location, we used a semi-structured interview protocol to learn more about how immigrants and their families were affected by the raid and how community members and organizations mobilized to support families in the aftermath. Across all three sites, we interviewed more than 20 individuals involved in rapid or ongoing response to support families and more than 70 immigrants who were affected by the raids. We summarize the sites visited below and provide additional details in Appendix I. Notably, each of these raids represented the largest worksite raid in more than a decade at the time they occurred.

**Sandusky and Salem, Ohio.** In June 2018, ICE agents conducted three raids within two weeks of each other, including at two locations of a gardening and landscaping center, Corsos, in Sandusky and nearby Castalia and another at the Fresh Mark meatpacking plant in Salem. Agents arrested a total of 260 people across the three raids, mostly Guatemalan and Mexican immigrants. CLASP visited Salem and Sandusky in December 2019 and interviewed a total of 11 legal service providers, community organizers, social workers, and government officials as well as nearly 30 immigrants directly affected by the raids.



**Allen, Texas.** On April 3, 2019, ICE agents raided CVE Technology Group, an electronics repair and refurbishing company based in the northern suburbs of Dallas. A total of 280 people were arrested, and the vast majority of them (more than three-quarters) were women and just under half were originally from Mexico.<sup>6</sup> In August 2019—four months after the raid—we interviewed a legal service provider and staff from a home visiting program, along with conducting a focus group with nine women who were working at CVE Technology Group on the day of the raid.



**Canton, Carthage, Forest, and Morton, Mississippi.** On August 7, 2019, a total of 680 workers were arrested in a series of worksite raids in Central Mississippi. ICE targeted several chicken processing plants affiliated with Koch Foods, Peco Foods, Pearl River Foods, PH Food, Inc., and MP Food, Inc. in the largest ever single-state operation. The vast majority of people arrested were women and most were originally from Guatemala. CLASP visited the communities impacted by the raids in November 2019 and interviewed a total of 13 faith leaders, legal service providers, community organizers, and mental health providers as well as more than 30 immigrant parents who were employed by the raided poultry plants.



## Key Findings



### Family Separation

Of the parents arrested across the sites, all were separated from their families and children for some period of time ranging from a few hours to several months. Current ICE agency guidelines on worksite raids involving more than 25 individuals require timely screening and release of those who are sole caregivers of minor children or have another “humanitarian concern” such as pregnant women, nursing mothers, individuals with a serious medical condition, or parents needed for the care of sick or special needs children or relatives. Guidelines also require that ICE coordinate with the Department of Health and Human Services to screen individuals for humanitarian concerns and notify local social service agencies when possible—like schools and child welfare agencies—in order to ensure timely coordination and resource allocation.<sup>7</sup>

ICE did not notify local social service agencies in advance of the raids in this study. This created a particular challenge in Mississippi because it was the first day of school in several of the communities where raids occurred. According to congressional testimony from the federal agent in charge of the Mississippi raids, calls to the schools were not made until after the raids began.<sup>8</sup> School officials were the ones to notify Child Protective Services (CPS) as they scrambled to take measures to ensure the safety of children. News reports showed children stranded overnight at a local gym, sleeping on the floor, and crying for their parents.<sup>9</sup> Several days following the raids, CPS reported that they had received several calls about children who had still not been located.<sup>10</sup> In Salem, Ohio, CPS representatives were on site at a local church to assist with placement of children; however, community members and faith leaders were able to intervene to ensure that children remained in the care of family members rather than unnecessarily enter foster care.

Timely screening of those eligible for release on humanitarian grounds varied across the sites. For example, some parents were able to quickly make phone calls to notify a spouse, caregiver, or child before being taken

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*“Family separation is family separation, whether it’s a border agent prying a baby from its mom’s arms or leaving a kid at school with no one to pick them up. It’s the same crime against humanity I would say.”*

– LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDER, OHIO

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## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

into custody, but most were unable to use their phone or otherwise make arrangements for their child's care until several hours or days after their arrest. In Texas, workers were asked before being transported from the facility whether they had children, and if they did, to write their child's name on a makeshift list so that schools could be notified. But some parents were distrustful of the agents' motivations and chose not to provide information, fearing what might happen to their children. In Ohio, screening varied across the different sites. In the Fresh Mark raid, some people were released immediately (such as pregnant women), but most parents were afraid to share information about their children with agents. A local priest convinced agents to allow him to talk to individuals prior to their transfer to a detention facility, and he took it upon himself to point out individuals he knew had medical conditions and should be released and to collect information directly from parents so that he could check each home to ensure no child was left alone. In the Mississippi raids, some parents were allowed to make calls prior to being arrested or before being transported to a detention center, but most were unable to contact their loved ones until late that evening or several days later.

**Several parents were ultimately deported after exhausting options for release or were forced into accepting deportation rather than face more time in prison or pay impossibly high bonds, some as high as \$18,000.**

In the Ohio and Mississippi raids, parents were held for several months in detention centers or prisons located several hours away, making it difficult and costly for families to visit. Several parents were ultimately deported after exhausting options for release or were forced into accepting deportation rather than face more time in prison or pay impossibly high bonds, some as high as \$18,000. One mother in Mississippi spent more than three months in detention several hours away from her young children, including a baby who was still breastfeeding at the time of her arrest (despite the ICE guidelines to release nursing mothers). She was finally able to see her two oldest sons, ages three and nine, briefly during the final court hearing where she was left no choice but to agree to deportation.

This mother was one of approximately 120 people arrested in the Mississippi worksite raids who faced federal criminal charges on top of civil immigration charges. Most were charged with documents fraud, misuse of a Social Security number, or false claims of U.S. citizenship. Those who weren't immediately released for humanitarian reasons were typically offered plea deals, allowing time spent in immigration detention to count as time served for their criminal charges. However, pleading guilty to these charges immediately made them ineligible for any form of immigration relief.<sup>11</sup> As a result, many of the mothers facing criminal charges had almost no chance of being able to remain in the U.S. with their children and other loved ones.

A priest in Mississippi who had conversations with dozens of children and parents from his parish describes the impact of losing a parent:

*"The role of parents makes the child feel secure. If one parent is missing, either the mother or the father, the kid may feel vulnerable...I would say it is grief...They lose someone. Although your mother or your father [is] alive, it is a loss. So they will manifest this in different ways. Some of them will act rebellious because they want to catch attention. Others will be more inhibited, sad, or shy. And others will have dreams or nightmares."*



## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

Family separation as a result of immigration enforcement creates several other hardships for children and families beyond threats to mental and physical health, including economic insecurity, housing and food instability, and limited mobility.

### Harm to Children's Mental and Physical Health

Research has documented the significant harm that being separated from a parent as a result of detention or deportation imposes on children, and that the harms are exacerbated the longer the separation draws out.<sup>12</sup> In previous studies, children whose family members had been subjected to worksite enforcement actions showed immediate signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as trouble sleeping, crying more often, and increased fear. In the longer term (more than six months following a raid), adverse behavioral changes—including regressions or delays in developmental milestones for young children and withdrawal and increased aggression in older children—were most common in cases where parents had been detained for more than a month and/or were ultimately deported.

The harm to children's mental and physical health in the sites CLASP visited mirrored many of the short- and long-term impacts of previous studies and often were intensified by the harmful effects of other anti-immigrant policies or rhetoric.

#### *Immediate trauma on day of the raid*

Across the three sites, parents and providers described children of all ages exhibiting significant signs of trauma upon learning of the raids. While trauma is generally common among children who are exposed to immigration enforcement, previous studies have shown that children who witness a parent's arrest and/or are separated from a parent suffer some of the greatest harms to their mental health.<sup>13</sup> Given the massive, record-breaking scale of the raids covered in this report—each considered the largest in U.S. history at the time they occurred—children sometimes witnessed part of the raid activities directly or were present during the emotional community gatherings afterward.

Because the poultry plant in Forest, Mississippi, is located near the elementary and high schools, several children saw their parents handcuffed in long lines outside the plant and shoved into white vans on their way home from school. Various parents and relatives recounted the screams and uncontrollable crying among children and youth who witnessed this. One mother described her panic when her daughters arrived at the house: the eldest, a 15-year-old who suffers from a chronic upper respiratory condition, ran out of the car with blood and tears streaming down her face and shirt, due to a nose bleed caused by the strain of her sobbing after seeing her father taken away. A community organizer shared the story of a five-year-old who, after finding out her mother had been taken, cried so hard that she gave herself a hernia and needed medical attention.

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*"[My daughter] told me, 'What's going on, mom? What's going on? Why is ICE over there? That's ICE, mom—it says on the back of their shirts.' I wanted to lie to my girl, I wanted to say 'Nothing's wrong, my love.'"*

— MOTHER, MISSISSIPPI

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## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

The raids were featured in local and national media, sometimes for weeks, making it difficult for families to shield children from scary images. One home visitor in Texas noted that one of her clients learned of the father's arrest when her eight-year-old son saw it happen on the local news channel. In Mississippi, some children who were brought to a local boxing gym after being stranded at school were interviewed on camera by local reporters, desperately crying and pleading for their parents to be released.<sup>14</sup>

### *Trauma following the raid*

Children and youth continued to suffer emotionally in the days, weeks, and months following the raids. Even those who had been reunited with parents exhibited signs of PTSD following their reunion, many having a hard time sleeping and showing signs of separation anxiety. Several parents mentioned that their children no longer wanted them to go to work or leave the house and were reluctant to be separated from them for any reason. During one of the parent focus groups organized at a local church in Mississippi, a few young children refused to go to the playroom and insisted on staying by their parents' side.

Children's feelings of loss for the missing parent were immense. A mother in Mississippi shared, "Their father was the one who takes them outside to play...he built fires and planted a garden...put lights on the house [for Christmas]." Parents talked about how children were no longer looking forward to the holidays, because their family was no longer together. Several providers and parents in Mississippi talked about how it was now common for children to come home, toss their backpacks, and spend the rest of the afternoon sleeping. To help give the kids a way to process their feelings, a church in Mississippi offered art therapy classes and helped older children organize a rally for their parents, calling for their release. A mother in Mississippi shared that her youngest daughter, only nine years old, even mentioned suicidal thoughts, saying that if her father wasn't released "she was going to kill herself." Children of all ages were also constantly worried about their parents who remained in detention and wanted to visit them or otherwise find ways to cheer them up.



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*"As for children, what hurts you as a child, stays with you all your life."*

— MOTHER, OHIO

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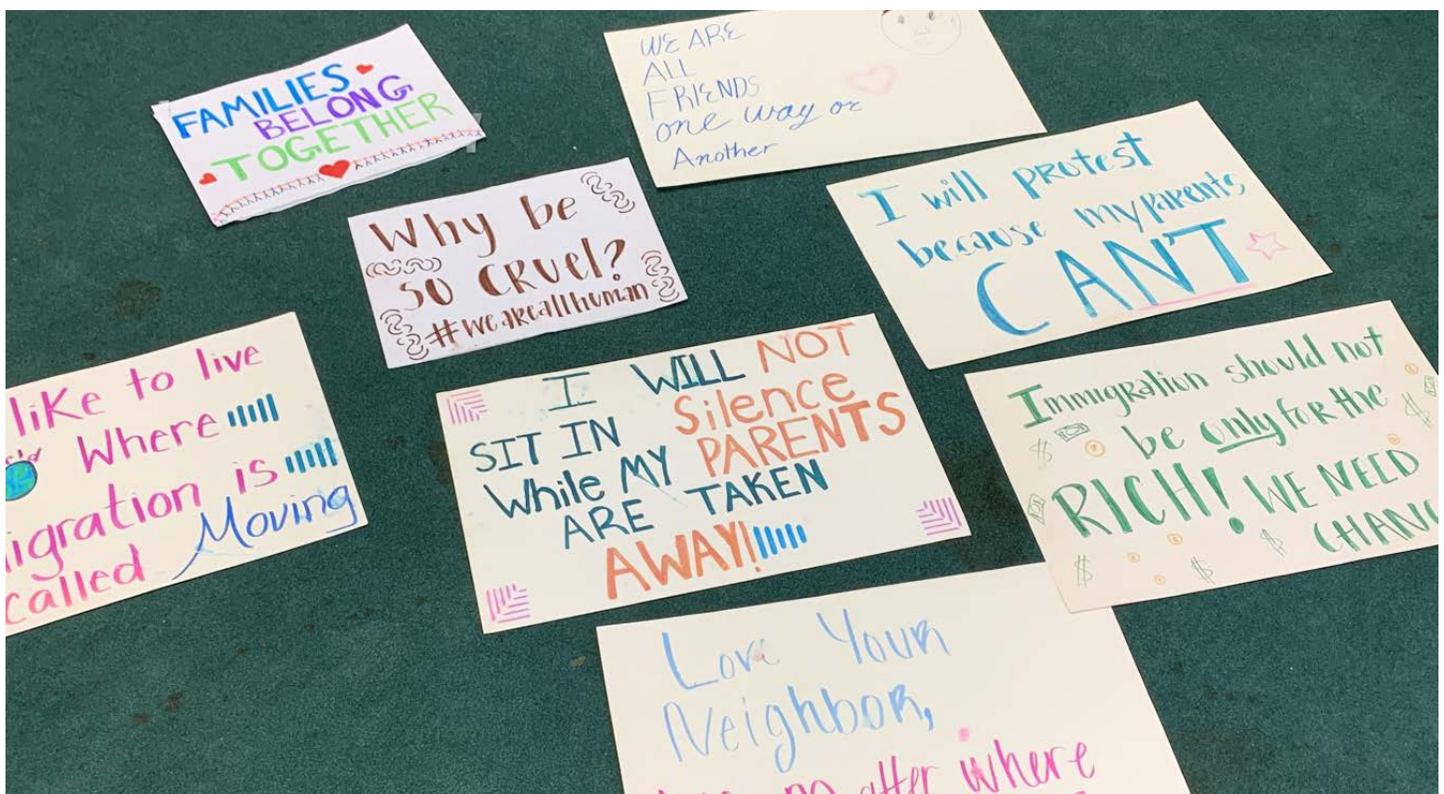
### Young Children Facing Life-long Consequences

Given the ages and characteristics of the parents who were implicated in the Mississippi raids, a large share of children were young. Providers estimate that about one-third of all children whose parents were arrested or who lost their jobs after the raids were between the ages of four and eight years old. A smaller but significant share were infants and toddlers. Several parents and providers noted that their young children didn't always express their feelings verbally, but their pain was apparent in their behavior and development. One mental health specialist in Mississippi noted that five-year-olds who had been potty-trained for years were suddenly bedwetting again, and three-year-olds were regressing in their speaking. Toddlers were no longer eating, sleeping, or playing as they normally did and many were acting out.

Some parents intentionally did not tell young children what had happened to their missing parent in an effort to protect them, but often this had adverse

consequences. For example, a three-year-old girl grew very anxious every time it started to get dark out, distressed that another day had gone by without her mother's return from work, as her father was hoping to avoid telling her the truth. A two-year-old girl in Mississippi, who many in her family believed to be oblivious to her father's absence, started to refuse to drink milk and, two weeks following her father's arrest, began to call for him to "come inside" when she was outside near his garden.

Child development research is clear about the importance of the early years in a child's physical, social, and emotional development and the long-term harm posed by constant exposure to toxic stress.<sup>15</sup> The research also emphasizes that a young child's development is further undermined by the cumulative effect of experiencing multiple types of hardship simultaneously—such as loss of a parent, food insecurity, and lower household income.<sup>16</sup>





## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

*“I don’t get to play anymore.”*

— TEN-YEAR-OLD BOY, MISSISSIPPI

### **Changes in routines and responsibilities**

Daily routines for children of all ages underwent dramatic changes because of heightened fear. In Sandusky, Ohio, a community organizer described how children no longer played outside and that soccer games ceased as families stayed hidden in their homes. Children were also very scared of opening the door and often begged their parents not to leave the house. A mom in Ohio described her seven-year-old son who always wants to know her whereabouts for the day before he leaves for school. When she goes on an errand—like to the grocery store—“he stays there waiting” for her to come back.

In both Mississippi and Texas, children missed several days of school or child care following the raids, which reflects previous reports following large immigration enforcement actions (in Ohio, school was not in session when the raids occurred). In Mississippi and Ohio, parents and youth noted that bullying in the schools had increased, with anti-immigrant statements made by both students and teachers to those whose parents had been arrested, such as saying that people arrested “deserved” what had happened to them. A priest in Mississippi noted that children’s grades were dropping, but parents were too stressed to address academic concerns.

Older youth were carrying a particularly heavy burden on their shoulders, taking on additional household responsibilities, caring for younger siblings, and working one or two jobs to help make up for the loss of a breadwinner. Some reported forgoing college plans to work and help provide for their families. A 16-year-old in Ohio was apprehended, handcuffed, and placed in a van along with other workers during the Fresh Mark raid—despite being a U.S. citizen and a minor. He shared that his biggest concern is whether he’ll turn 18 in time to take on full custody of his two younger siblings (15 and 11 years old) before his parents’ deportation proceedings are concluded. He shared his plans should it turn out both his parents are deported to Mexico:

*“I’ll be 18 soon, I’ll be an adult by then. If my parents get deported, I’d fight to have my brother and sister stay. I’d have to drop out of school to get a good job—labor job—to be able to pay rent, food, everything. I’d become the new parent for the family. I already kind of had to take up the role because my mom had to work all the time...We don’t have family here. Everyone else we know are in the same situation—they don’t have money or space for extra people to maintain.”*



## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

### Harm to Parents' Mental and Physical Health

In all three sites, parents who were detained as well as their partners suffered mental and physical health impacts, even several months following the raids. Child development research tells us how closely intertwined parents' mental health is with that of their children. Starting from birth, secure relationships with parents provide a strong social-emotional foundation for children, promoting positive self-esteem and the complex social and cognitive skills necessary for success in school and beyond.<sup>17</sup> Many factors can negatively affect children's social-emotional development, including psychosocial stressors such as poverty, traumatic events, parent mental illness, and prolonged separation from a parent.<sup>18</sup> In many cases, these stressors also inhibit parents from being fully responsive to their children's needs.

#### *Parents directly impacted by the raid*

Many of the parents we spoke to across the three sites were present when the raid happened in their workplace, and several were detained. It was difficult for them to recount the raid itself, and many cried as they shared the details. Feelings of disbelief and confusion as the raid began were common, as were feelings of desperation and fear as soon as the reality of the situation became clear.

For parents, the first thing that came to mind as the raid happened was their children. As one mother in Texas said, "All I could think about is who was going to take care of them, and if I was ever going to see them again." Several parents also talked about how painful it was for them to be separated from their children, some for days and months, often without the ability to talk regularly by phone—due to the high costs of phone calls at detention facilities—or have visits since the detention centers and prisons were several hours away.

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*"We laugh about how the raid happened to us, but deep down, we are destroyed."*

— MOTHER, TEXAS

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## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

Mothers who were separated from babies and toddlers, including those who had been nursing, suffered additional emotional trauma and painful conditions such as mastitis which is often caused when a mother is unable to breastfeed on her regular schedule. Again, these nursing mothers were detained despite ICE guidelines advising against it. A mother in Ohio wept as she recalled being jailed and having heartbreaking phone calls with her four-year-old daughter who would constantly beg her to come home, as well as the increasing hopelessness she felt as the weeks went by. Several parents who were eventually released from detention also recalled the troubling reaction of young children who were suddenly distant, including a six-year-old boy in Mississippi who refused to hug or come close to his mother for several days once she returned home.



Parents recalled feeling as though they were being treated as dangerous criminals during the raid, particularly in the Mississippi and Ohio raids where several parents described officers yelling at them and pushing them to the ground. In Mississippi, where the raid occurred in the intense heat of August, workers were handcuffed and loaded into vans while still wearing the wool hats and heavy clothing they used to stay warm in the freezer-like facilities they worked in. One mother recalled not being able to use the bathroom before being taken away, as she was only permitted a 20 to 30-minute break during her 12-hour shift. She was forced to endure the long bus ride from Mississippi to Louisiana in pants heavily soiled with her urine and blood as she was menstruating. She ended up with an infection after having to wait several days to clean herself.

Several parents also talked about feelings of betrayal regarding their employers. For example, Texas parents shared their belief that employers allowed ICE access to the facility a few days prior to the raid, telling workers that they needed to provide a tour of the facility to a utility provider. "I think they wanted to make sure they knew where they could hold us and where all the exits are," one parent speculated. Workers expressed hurt that employers who had known them and their families for years had helped conspire against them rather than try to protect them. In one of the Ohio raids, workers shared that their supervisors had told them to stop working and to meet for doughnuts. And instead of doughnuts, ICE agents were waiting for them. In both Mississippi and some of the Ohio sites, parents and providers also talked about the dehumanizing treatment workers received in the workplace, including long work hours without sufficient breaks, harsh supervisors, and unsafe working conditions that often led to physical injury.

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*"I don't have happy days anymore."*

— MOTHER, MISSISSIPPI

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## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

The raid and the uncertainty that followed exacerbated underlying mental health issues for parents. One community-based provider in Ohio highlighted that many of the Guatemalan workers who had been involved in the Fresh Mark raid had already undergone significant trauma in their home country and during their journey to the United States, with several pursuing asylum. Similarly, several Mississippi faith leaders and social service providers reflected that many of the Guatemalan women arrested—including those facing criminal charges—had less than a third-grade education, and had experienced domestic abuse or other violence.

### *Parents whose partners were detained*

Parents who were left behind to care and provide for children also experienced serious impacts on their mental and physical health. Many also recounted feelings of shock and despair as they learned about their partner's arrest. Some received phone calls directly from their partner before being apprehended and others learned about the raids from neighbors and friends. In Ohio and Mississippi, where many workers were not immediately released, the uncertainty of where loved ones were being held intensified the worry for families.

For parents who were trying to cope with the sudden absence of a partner, it was incredibly difficult to provide the emotional support and stability their children needed as they dealt with their own emotional pain, the sudden financial strain due to the loss of a breadwinner, and the urgent need to seek out legal assistance for their partner. Many reported not being able to sleep, loss of appetite, constant headaches, and panic attacks. One mother in Mississippi shared that it wasn't until her eldest daughter told her that her nine-year-old sister was not doing well and "needed her" that she was able to even notice and attempt to address her daughter's signs of depression.

### **Agonizing Choices**

Parents shared the incredible strain of having to make heartbreaking decisions regarding their family's future, especially as their partners spent unforeseeable amounts of time in detention or were ultimately deported. Even those who preferred to stay in the United States for the sake of their children were struggling with how they would be able to do so with limited options for work and without their partner.

For some families, leaving was an impossibility—as these decisions were contingent on medical needs of parents or children that could not be met in their home country or increased political or economic instability in their home country. In Mississippi and Ohio, many of the parents are indigenous Guatemalans and face discrimination and crippling poverty in their home country. A U.S. citizen mother in Ohio, who has serious medical conditions and is battling cancer, explained, "No—I can't live in Mexico. Health wise, I cannot live in Mexico. There I have no money, no insurance, no operation, no chemo, and my kids were born here...But the kids also would hurt so much without their father."

The day we spoke with him, a Guatemalan father in Mississippi had just learned that his wife was going to be deported to Mexico after spending several months in detention, separated from her family. Because she had no family in Mexico able to help with the children, their plan was to send their baby girl and three-year-old son to reunite with her and then to have them cross the border together to Guatemala where her husband's family would take them in. The father's plan was to stay behind with their oldest son, who was nine, and try to send money to Guatemala to help support them.



## **The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families**

In both Ohio and Mississippi, a significant number of mothers were detained for long periods of time, leaving fathers to take on primary child care responsibilities that some were not accustomed to. Because the Mississippi raids happened during the day, many of those detained were mothers who worked the day shift in order to be home with their children after school while their partners worked the night shift. A lawyer in Mississippi stated, “It was sad...you had a lot of situations where dads who had never had any primary responsibility for child care—they’re coming in [saying] please help me. I have a five-year-old, a three-year-old, and a one-year-old. I can’t do it.”

Parents whose partners got detained were often also paralyzed by fear, drastically changing their routines, and hiding out in their homes, sometimes for several days or even weeks. One father in Mississippi stayed locked inside the house with the blinds drawn for almost two weeks, often breaking down in tears in front of his three young daughters, and would not come out until several neighbors finally convinced him it was safe. Many were increasingly afraid of opening the door, concerned that immigration agents were coming after them next. Across the sites, parents were also limiting the number of outings they made, isolating themselves and their children, and relying on others to run errands for them.

### **Economic Hardship**

Prior to the raids, most of the families impacted had low incomes and struggled to make ends meet. Like many undocumented workers, parents often worked for low wages and were also paying high rent due to exploitation by landlords. For a family to survive, both parents often had to work and split day and evening shifts to avoid the additional cost of child care. Following the raids, the need for parents and other family members—including older youth—to find new or additional employment became urgent and meeting basic needs like rent, food, and utilities became an immediate challenge. As one mother in Mississippi stated, “There is no work, no money, no means to buy anything for the kids.”

### **Loss of Employment**

Across the sites, the loss of employment following arrest was exacerbated by parents’ inability to find work elsewhere. In Texas, parents mentioned that everywhere they applied for work—from other factories to restaurants to hotels—they were turned away. Parents wearing ankle bracelets also were often immediately turned away.

In Mississippi and in some of the Ohio sites, parents in the same households lost their income simultaneously as both parents worked for the same employer. Sometimes even parents who were U.S. citizens or had work authorization lost their jobs. In Mississippi, where there were few options outside of the poultry plants for immigrants to work, the situation was particularly dire. One father mentioned that the only other work available was in landscaping or roofing, both of which required previous experience and where limited openings were available given the winter season. Some parents were too scared to go back to work at all, including those in the community who had not been impacted by the raid but were afraid of possible raids in their own workplace.

One worker in Mississippi who was heavily engaged in coordinating relief efforts for families in the months after the raid talked at length about how much people want to work, to be self-sufficient. She described a father who is “consistently saying ‘we don’t want a handout, we want to be able to contribute, we want to be able to take care of our families.’”



## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

### *Rent, food, and utilities*

Across the sites, families relied initially on donations and community organizations or churches to address the sudden loss in household income. Some parents in Texas who had been arrested had a spouse who was still employed, so they were living on a tighter budget. In Ohio, the financial strain on the families often varied depending on the length of time the arrested parent was detained, and some were ultimately forced to leave their homes or move from the area altogether. In Salem, Ohio one faith leader commented, “A fourth of them [in our congregation] had to move...I don’t know what happened to them.”

In Mississippi, where it was nearly impossible for parents left behind to find alternatives for employment and where many had limited ability to work due to child care needs, families often needed to depend longer on assistance from organizations and churches. At the time of CLASP’s visit to Mississippi, more than three months had passed since the raids and all of the families we interviewed were still relying on donations to cover their basic needs, including rent and utilities. Families mentioned trying to conserve energy to keep down electricity costs, and parents also pointed out that children were eating more chips and soda than usual since that was often the food donated.

### *Legal and detention-related expenses*

In addition to the economic instability caused by losing one or sometimes both breadwinners in the household, families also had to find resources to cover legal expenses for the parent in detention, including high bonds for release. Legal expenses quickly added up to thousands of dollars for families earning low wages and with little savings. In Mississippi, the bonds were as high as \$18,000 due to the felony charges related to identity fraud. And in Ohio, some of the bonds were considered “moderate,” yet families were paying \$2,000-\$5,000 to get a loved one released. In both Ohio and Mississippi, many parents who were trying to get their partner released quickly spent more money than necessary on legal assistance or were not aware of pro bono representation. We also heard of incidents across the sites of individuals in the community taking advantage of the situation by charging excessively high fees or offering fraudulent services.

Keeping in touch with detained loved ones also created a financial burden but served as an important outlet for children and youth desperate to know how their mother or father was doing. Several family members and providers noted the high cost of phone calls to those in detention. Many families reported having to deposit \$30-\$50 a week for only a few minutes of phone time per day. People in Ohio and Mississippi who lacked drivers licenses or transportation needed to pay a driver to visit their loved one in detention—one round-trip ride cost anywhere from \$100-\$200.

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*“The first person I met with was here in Carthage, and he said,  
‘Can [you] get me a job?’”*

– IMMIGRANT SUPPORT WORKER, MISSISSIPPI

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## The Day That ICE Came: How Worksite Raids Are Once Again Harming Children and Families

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*“It’s too hard for just one person to support the household.”*

— MOTHER, TEXAS

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In Mississippi, many families also struggled to pull together the resources to support parents who were facing deportation or had already been deported. In some cases, particularly when it was a mother who had been deported, families and attorneys struggled to sort out how to pay for children’s travel expenses and get all the necessary documents in order, including passports, properly notarized school and medical records, and powers of attorney for caretakers of children left in the United States. Once a parent was set to be deported, families often had very little time to raise the funds needed or make arrangements, and it was not clear if ICE would assist in travel arrangements and expenses.

### **Stress on Providers and Community Leaders**

The devastating impact of the raids extended beyond the families directly involved. Community leaders such as school superintendents, law enforcement officials, and other elected officials were shocked and outraged by the militaristic nature and massive scale of the raids. During a congressional field hearing in Mississippi in November of 2019, a local sheriff and mayor testified about the challenges they faced in being able to respond adequately to the needs of the community on the day of the raids without advance notice from the federal government.<sup>19</sup> While the Mississippi operation entailed more than 18 months of planning, the additional disruption and trauma caused by conducting raids on the first day of school was never a consideration. During the congressional field hearing, Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent Jere Miles stated, “...what is the difference between the first day or the tenth day of school? The parents are still not going home...”<sup>20</sup>

Due to the lack of advance notification across the sites, legal service providers, faith leaders, and other immigrant-serving organizations that engaged with the families regularly were forced to quickly respond to the immediate needs of families in the aftermath of the raids, including ensuring children were taken care of, basic needs were met, and that families were connected to legal services. In Ohio and Mississippi, the immediate crisis response extended into several months of long-term support that required significant fundraising and shifts in organizational functions to help sustain families as they awaited the release of a loved one.

### **Increased demand on community-serving organizations**

From the initial crisis response to the months that followed, many faith leaders and legal and social service providers in the community experienced a significant shift in demand for their support as well as the types of services and supports they were offering. Organizations involved in response efforts often had to rearrange their own internal priorities as raid response took precedent over other typical activities, like offering English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. In Mississippi, a church had to hire staff to help with administrative tasks that were new and high in demand, like processing check payments to families. In Ohio, a community provider ended up creating jobs, including in-house food preparation, to help individuals in desperate need of work.

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*“My daughters want to talk to their father every day...but I’m spending a lot.”*

— MOTHER, MISSISSIPPI

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Legal and mental health supports were generally in short supply even before the raids. Afterward, the demands on providers' time increased ten-fold. "After the raids, a very overwhelming schedule became madness," shared a mental health therapist working with families in Mississippi—the only bilingual, trauma-informed counselor in the entire state at the time of our interview. "It's hard for me to point out things I remember because August was a complete fog. [I was working] 60, 70 hours a week, had no days off." It is also important to note that in both Ohio and Mississippi, where many of the individuals affected were indigenous Guatemalans, access to language-accessible services has always been a challenge.

Lawyers in Ohio and Texas expressed how overburdened they were before the raids. A lawyer working with families affected by the raids in Mississippi said, "it's always been on an emergency level." Before the raids, there were 2,000 people across immigrant detention centers in the South with only two or three lawyers to support them.

Churches and faith leaders with long-standing and deep roots in the community noted an immediate increase in demand and change in the types of supports provided. Churches played a significant role in responding to the raids in each community we visited, and affected communities relied heavily on church leaders for everything including food, financial assistance, transportation—even finding employment. One church in Mississippi was supporting at least 60-65 families with food and supplies on top of rent and utility assistance. Church staff and volunteers also provided emotional support and counseling to families who had been affected by the raids because they were highly trusted by the community, and because of the shortage of mental health services.

Less than three months after the raids in Mississippi, providers were already thinking about how their service models might need to change along with the longer-term sustainability of their funding. A coalition of organizations came together immediately after the raids to fundraise and offer direct support through churches for food and supplies, along with assistance for rent and utility payments. One coalition member estimated that about one thousand children were in families receiving rent and utility support as of October 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created additional health and economic challenges for families impacted by the raids, including outbreaks of the virus in meat processing and poultry plants in Ohio and Mississippi. Before the pandemic, communities in Mississippi were already running out of the aid that had helped support families following the raids. Now, the difficulty of finding employment has increased due to the effects of the pandemic. Even for those who were able to secure employment, the employers did not provide Personal Protective Equipment and workers had to take unpaid time off, sometimes for up to a month, when they inevitably grew ill.

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*"I wish there were thousands of me..."*

— LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDER, TEXAS

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### *Impacts on providers' mental health and wellbeing*

The providers we spoke with described the responsibility they felt to give families a sense of safety and stability. But the providers themselves were struggling with the enormity of the situation at hand, as well as the dire outlook for many of the families who had little hope of being able to secure immigration relief for their loved one arrested in the raid.

"I felt like I was floating," said the secretary at one of the local churches in Mississippi that served as a triage site on the day of the raid, where families could gather, identify whether their loved ones had been arrested, and speak to legal service providers. "Sometimes I didn't know what to say to the children to calm them or make them feel better, because I myself was broken."

"It was so massive that I still don't have words to describe it," said the mental health therapist in Mississippi, describing an initial intake clinic for families in the weeks immediately following the raid. "A list of 30 people were suicidal—they were there with their children, and all they could do was sob. It was mass hysteria."

She faced her own considerable health challenges, including a stroke, within a couple of months after the raid in Mississippi, which she attributed in part to the stress of supporting families during that time. "It feels like I'm fighting a massive wave that's coming at you and you're just watching it. You're just paralyzed, waiting for the wave to grab you. That's the best description I have of the situation."

**One church in Mississippi was supporting at least 60-65 families with food and supplies on top of rent and utility assistance.**

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*"I would say I've definitely suffered secondary trauma from the raids."*

— LEGAL SERVICE PROVIDER, OHIO

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## Conclusion: A More Hopeful Vision for the Future

The return of worksite raids under the Trump Administration is unfortunately only one of the many anti-immigrant policies in recent years that have compromised the safety, health, and overall wellbeing of children and families, including millions of U.S. citizen children. The images of hundreds of workers, most of whom are parents working to support their families, being handcuffed and shoved into vans along with children weeping and begging for their mom or dad to come home, are not reflective of our American values. Furthermore, the cumulative effect of these policy decisions on children's development means that an entire generation of children are being denied the ability to achieve their full potential, with dire consequences for our nation's future.

An alternative and more hopeful vision for our future is represented in the remarkable resilience of the families impacted by the raids as well as the heroic community members who stepped forward to do the right thing by renouncing the raids and working together to support the families whose lives were turned upside down. As one legal service provider in Mississippi stated, "My prayer is that our shared humanity will unite us in the quest to make certain that serious harm does not come to these good people who have come to our country and demonstrated a work ethic and commitment to family that should serve as an inspiration for us all."<sup>21</sup>

When asked if they thought their life was better here in the United States or back in their country, three parents—all indigenous Guatemalans—paused for a long time. One father reflected, "It's a hard life here and there. Here we are discriminated against and are persecuted by ICE. In our country we are discriminated against and persecuted by poverty and crime." After contemplating a few minutes, they all passionately agreed on the answer: "The reason we endure the suffering here is for our children. For them and their future, the sacrifice is worth it."

Just a few months following the conclusion of CLASP's site visits, the United States was faced with the unprecedented health and economic crisis created by COVID-19, and it became increasingly clear how interconnected we are—much in the same way the worksite raids covered in this report demonstrated at the local level how closely tied immigrants and their families are to their communities. Once again rising to meet the challenge posed by COVID-19, community organizers in Mississippi took it upon themselves to create a promotora network to help immigrant community members through community education, resource sharing, and distribution of funds and supplies—including medicine, food, cleaning supplies, and thousands of masks. As one community leader in Mississippi put it, "In emergencies, there is always resiliency in our community."

We are facing a critical crossroads as a country, and it is evident that we must unite around a vision for our future that recognizes the value of all our children to the nation's prosperity and prioritizes their wellbeing in policy decisions, including the 1 in 4 children growing up in the United States who are members of immigrant families.

### Acknowledgements

**This report would not be possible without the dozens of courageous parents, service providers, and advocates who took the time to speak with us.** We are deeply grateful for their willingness to share their experiences and for the work they do to support immigrant families every day. We'd also like to thank the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Alliance for Early Success, Heising-Simons Foundation, Irving Harris Foundation, and Richard W. Goldman Foundation for their generous support.

The authors also want to extend our thanks to Hannah Matthews, Lynn Tramonte, and the CLASP communications team for their helpful review and insights. While the authors are grateful for all assistance and funding related to this paper, the authors alone are responsible for its content.

## Appendix I. Site details

Between August and December 2019, CLASP conducted three site visits in communities that have experienced large-scale worksite raids since January 2017. In each location, we used a semi-structured interview protocol to learn more about how immigrants and their families were impacted by the raid and how community members and organizations mobilized to support families in the aftermath. Across all three sites, we interviewed more than 20 individuals involved in rapid or ongoing response to support families and more than 70 immigrants who were affected by the raids.

**Sandusky and Salem, Ohio.** On June 5, 2018, ICE agents raided two locations of Corsos Flower and Garden Center in Sandusky and nearby Castalia, arresting a total of 114 people. On June 19—exactly two weeks later—agents raided Fresh Mark, a meatpacking plant in Salem, arresting 146 workers. The majority of workers arrested during the Corsos raid were Mexican immigrants, while the Fresh Mark raids mostly implicated Guatemalan immigrants.

CLASP visited Sandusky and Salem in December 2019, roughly 18 months after the raids took place. We interviewed a total of 11 legal service providers, community organizers, social workers, and government officials as well as nearly 30 immigrants directly affected by the raids in Ohio.

**Allen, Texas.** On April 3, 2019, ICE agents raided CVE Technology Group, an electronics repair and refurbishing company based in the northern suburbs of Dallas. A total of 280 people were arrested, making it the largest single-site operation in the last decade. The vast majority<sup>22</sup> of people arrested (more than three-quarters) were women and just under half were originally from Mexico. The ACLU of Texas—which is investigating whether workers' civil rights were violated during the course of the raid—reported<sup>23</sup> that most workers have lived in the United States for many years. The ACLU is currently suing<sup>24</sup> ICE for refusing to provide copies of the search warrants used during the raid.

CLASP staff visited Allen in August 2019, four months after the raid. We interviewed health and social service providers and one legal service provider. While some of the social service providers served families impacted by the raid, none indicated that their programs were involved in the rapid or ongoing response efforts, so their interviews are not reflected in this report. We also conducted a focus group with nine women who were working at CVE Technology Group on the day of the raid.

**Canton, Carthage, Forest, and Morton, Mississippi.** On August 7, 2019, a total of 680 workers were arrested in a series of worksite raids in Central Mississippi. ICE targeted several chicken processing plants affiliated with Koch Foods, Peco Foods, Pearl River Foods, PH Food, Inc., and MP Food, Inc. in the largest ever single-state operation. The vast majority of people arrested were women and most were originally from Guatemala. The majority also had long-standing residence in the United States. The raids took place on the first day of school in many communities.

Notably, the Department of Justice indicted roughly 120 workers—mostly young mothers who fled sexual violence in their home countries and had no criminal records—with felony charges ranging from criminal reentry to documents fraud. At the time of our interviews, at least half of these women were already in deportation proceedings.

CLASP visited Morton, Canton, Carthage, and Forest, Mississippi in November 2019, just over three months after the raids took place. We interviewed a total of 13 faith leaders, legal service providers, community organizers, and mental health providers as well as more than 30 immigrant parents who were employed by the raided poultry plants.



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