August 2, 2019

The Honorable Kevin K. McAleenan
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary McAleenan:

On behalf of the California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT), a dedicated group of over 32,000 mental health workers, we write to express our deep disturbance regarding the continued practice of separating children from their parents at the U.S. border. CAMFT requests that this administration immediately end this psychologically scarring practice and convene a meeting with the numerous mental health organizations reaching out to help craft humane and viable immigration policy.

The seminal research study by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) on Adverse Childhood Experiences* (ACE), as well as numerous subsequent ACE studies, outline the direct consequences of traumatic events on children as they grow older. Children who experience difficult life events such as being suddenly and unexpectedly separated from their parents show increased incidents of chronic disease, academic struggle, incarceration, homelessness and substance abuse throughout their lifetimes. These lingering trauma symptoms hamper the trajectory of their economic success and stability.

CAMFT recognizes the crisis this administration is facing, and the need to fix the broken and complicated immigration system. As mental health experts, CAMFT appeals to you to:

1. End the practice of child/parent separation;
2. Allocate additional resources to the reunification of children/families previously separated;
3. Allocate additional resources to the training of staff charged with the care of the immigrant population currently confined; and,
4. Convene a meeting with mental health experts to help create viable and humane immigration policy.

CAMFT welcomes the opportunity to dialogue with you and offer our services as mental health experts to discuss these ideas further.

Sincerely,

Nabil El-Ghoroury, PhD, CAE
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cc: U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M. Azar II

* https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/acestudy/about.html