



On behalf of First 5 Monterey County, we are writing in opposition to proposed changes that would remove protections for migrant children at the border in the company of their parents or caregivers. These changes would allow children to be incarcerated indefinitely in detention facilities. While young children may not have words, we need to respond to their cries for help. The Administration has a chance to be responsive to the needs of babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. Children who are currently separated from their caregivers must immediately be reunited with their families and the practice of family detentions needs to end.

Families experiencing separation are families who experience trauma. Bonds critical to early childhood development are broken when young children are separated from their loved ones. Babies and toddlers are not too young to be affected by the events around them. In fact, trauma creates physiological damage to their brains and emotional damage that will carry into the future. Research, science and experience all confirm that the parent-child relationship is critical to the short- and long-term success of a child. Denying young children at the border to be with a safe and secure family member or caregiver is a form of child abuse.

Years of research in child development also clearly show that babies' physical and social environments have a significant impact on their development. Family detention places children in an environment of confinement, deprivation of stimuli, and developmentally inappropriate and often harsh treatment. This causes severe stress and trauma for both the children and their caregivers. Evaluations of children who have been detained with their families reveal alarming outcomes including developmental delays and signs of emotional disturbance. Further compounding the risks to their well-being, families in detention may face inadequate access to services including the medical and mental health care they so desperately need.

We cannot afford to ignore children's cries. Now is the time to act and not disregard decades of science and research. Young children need their families. It is time to end family separations and detentions at the border.