



National Task Force to End
Sexual & Domestic Violence

ALLIANCE FOR
IMMIGRANT SURVIVORS

March 10, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Advocates for Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence Strongly Oppose the Reinstatement of Family Detention for Migrants and Asylum Seekers

Dear President Biden:

During Women's History Month, the Steering Committee of the National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence ("NTF") and the Alliance for Immigrant Survivors ("AIS"), whose members are and represent hundreds of other organizations across the country that advocate on behalf of sexual and domestic violence victims and women's rights, **express our deep disappointment in the news that your administration is considering [reviving the detention of immigrant families](#), a callous, dehumanizing policy that you previously condemned.**

Migrants and asylum seekers often flee unspeakable acts of gender-based violence (GBV) at home such as human trafficking, sexual assault, sexual slavery, kidnapping, harassment, and other trauma. In trying to seek safety in the U.S., many endure further atrocities and exploitation on their journeys to the U.S., and [again at the U.S.-Mexico border](#). As we witnessed during the Obama administration, the detention of adult and child survivors of sexual and domestic violence is re-traumatizing in and of itself. The intense restrictions and disciplinary rules and verbal and sexual abuse inside the facilities, combined with the arbitrary, indefinite, and prolonged nature of detention, inflict lasting physical and psychological harm, including serious symptoms of re-traumatization for survivors of violence.

It is nearly impossible for traumatized victims of violence to obtain competent, linguistically appropriate, and culturally relevant mental health services in detention. It is similarly difficult for them to meaningfully access the legal process to which they are entitled. Like countless [pediatricians](#) and other [medical](#) and [mental health experts](#), you

already recognized the inhumanity of family detention when you stated, "[Children should be released from ICE detention with their parents immediately. This is pretty simple, and I can't believe I have to say it: Families belong together.](#)"

Family detention also does nothing to alleviate the ongoing tragedy of sexual assault and gender-based violence occurring daily at the border. In the 2021 [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#), your administration committed to enacting "policies to reduce vulnerability to abuse and exploitation faced by immigrants and noncitizens, especially women, girls and LGBTQI+ individuals," and to "...support improved pathways to safety, including asylum and humanitarian relief, for those fleeing persecution." A return to family detention does the opposite, and places those most in need of support and stability at great risk of additional and deepening harm. The burdens of this policy will be borne disproportionately by Black, Brown, and Indigenous immigrants, in direct contradiction to your administration's commitments to [advance racial equity](#).

To learn that your administration is considering a return to this cruel policy is heartbreaking and infuriating. Immigrant survivors of violence and all immigrants deserve far better. We denounce this practice and urge your administration to reject it wholeheartedly – and to instead adopt approaches that recognize the inherent human dignity of immigrant survivors of violence, their children, and all immigrants.

It is critical that we ensure that survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault have meaningful opportunities to recover from trauma and pursue legal protections. This is a matter of life or death for many detained adult and child survivors. Please do not hesitate to contact Kirsten Rambo at ASISTA Immigration Assistance at kirsten@asistahelp.org or 404.416.4610, Grace Huang at the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence at ghuang@api-gbv.org or 206.313.1232, Casey Swegman at Tahirih Justice Center at caseys@tahirih.org or 571.356.9491, or Olivia Garcia at Esperanza United at ogarcia@esperanzaunited.org or 202.891.8483 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

The National Task Force to End Sexual and Domestic Violence
Alliance for Immigrant Survivors

cc: DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas
White House Gender Policy Council
Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus
Congressional Hispanic Caucus
Congressional Progressive Caucus
Congressional Working Group on Domestic Violence