



Working to Reduce Poverty in America.



March 17, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly
Secretary
United States Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Re: Concern over Family Separation at the U.S. / Mexico Border

Dear Secretary Kelly,

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration (USCCB/COM), Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA), and the Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC), we write you to express our concern regarding statements you made on March 6th regarding your department's considering a future policy of separating parents from children as they arrive at the U.S./Mexico border.¹

As you know, family unity is a cornerstone of our American immigration system and a foundational element of Catholic teaching. We believe that separating families would be extremely detrimental to basic child welfare principles, contrary to our Catholic values, and ineffective to the goals of deterrence and safety. We urge you to reject this harmful policy.

We are longstanding providers of social, legal, and other human services who proudly work with the U.S. government to help immigrants and refugees nationally. We operate all of our programs based on accepted social and child welfare principles, such as the "Best Interest of the Child" standard and trauma-informed care. Except in cases of abuse, abandonment, and neglect, it is always in the best interest of children to be with their own mother and father and family. Separating children from their parents causes trauma that often leads to irreparable emotional scarring. From our years of experience, we know that children should always be placed in the least restrictive setting and therefore in a safe, family environment, ideally, with their own families.

The Catholic Church recognizes that the family is at the center of social life, and so the Church places family unity at the center of its advocacy for migrants and refugees. *See* USCCB-CEM, *Strangers No Longer*, Nos. 64-67 (2003). Migrant and refugee families already suffer extraordinary strain. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, No. 46. All governments, here and abroad, should protect families and help keep them intact, not purposely separate them. *See Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 2209-11. This important responsibility would be countered by a policy that would separate parents from their children at our southern border.

¹ DHS Secretary Kelly Interview, CNN Situation Room (March 6, 2017) (available at <http://www.cnn.com/videos/politics/2017/03/06/john-kelly-dhs-trump-travel-ban-wiretap-tsr-intv-full.cnn>).

While we appreciate and recognize your stated concern for the dangers that families would encounter during their migration to the United States, we strongly believe that separating parents from children will not deter families from making such a treacherous journey. A family separation policy would not cure the pervasive root causes of migration existing in the Northern Triangle today, such as community or state-sanctioned violence, poverty, lack of educational opportunity, gang recruitment, domestic abuse, and family separation. These are the factors that are compelling children and families to take the enormous risks of migration, including the possible additional risk of family separation at the border. These are the factors, therefore, that must be addressed as we look to repair our broken immigration system.

Furthermore, separating families at the U.S./Mexico border would bring an end to the common practice of families' voluntarily presenting themselves to Border Patrol officers. Instead, families will be fearful and could avoid peacefully presenting themselves, putting them and our Border Patrol officers at increased risk and danger. In turn, families are more likely to resort to smugglers and traffickers. Like so many DHS agents, we have seen the dangers of smuggling and trafficking firsthand and know the deadly consequences. We share a joint goal with your department in combatting smuggling and trafficking rings and eradicating human exploitation. We fear, however, that a policy of separating families at the border will not advance that shared goal, but undermine it.

In sum, we respectfully request that you reject this proposal. We would be happy to supply more information on this topic to you and your staff. We have been grateful to operate in partnership with DHS on many programs and policies since the inception of the Department. We value our relationship with you and look forward to continuing our partnership. We are committed to ensuring humane implementation of our laws and will gladly work with you to make sure that most vulnerable are protected.

Sincerely,

(b)(6)

Most Reverend Joe Vásquez
Bishop of Austin
Chairman, USCCB Committee on Migration

Most Reverend Kevin W. Vann
Bishop of Orange, CA
Chairman, Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.

(b)(6)

Sr. Donna Markham, OP, PhD
President and CEO
Catholic Charities, USA

From: Carroll, Kevin T.
Sent: 17 Mar 2017 15:59:20 -0400
To: S1JFK
Subject: FW: Private Letter for Secretary Kelly
Attachments: FamilySeparation31717.pdf, FamilySeparation31717.docx

Sir, FYI, and happy Saint Patrick's Day. -- Kevin

Kevin T. Carroll
Counselor, DHS

M: (b)(6)

From: Carroll, Kevin T.
Sent: Friday, March 17, 2017 3:57:10 PM
To: Brodsky, Marcy; Clark, Alaina
Subject: FW: Private Letter for Secretary Kelly

FYI.

Kevin T. Carroll
Counselor, DHS

M: (b)(6)

From: (b)(6)
Sent: Friday, March 17, 2017 3:47:05 PM
To: Carroll, Kevin T.
Cc: (b)(6)
Subject: Private Letter for Secretary Kelly

Kevin,

Greetings. Attached please find a letter for Secretary Kelly focusing on concerns with family separation at the border. This is a private letter and will not be published or publicized.

Do let me know if there is another way you recommend we get this letter to the Secretary.

Thank you for your collaboration,

(b)(6)