



November 16, 2018

ATTORNEY GENERAL MADIGAN DEMANDS END TO POLICY THAT DELAYS AND PREVENTS IMMIGRANT FAMILIES FROM REUNITING

Chicago — Attorney General Lisa Madigan and a coalition of state attorneys general sent a letter to the federal government demanding the immediate reversal of a policy that has delayed and prevented the placement of unaccompanied migrant children with their family members or other appropriate sponsors living in the United States and as a result, kept children in prolonged federal detention.

[In their letter sent Thursday](#) to U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex M. Azar II and U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen M. Nielsen, Madigan and the other state attorneys general said the policy requires prospective sponsors of unaccompanied migrant children and their entire households to submit to fingerprinting and background checks, which are automatically shared with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The letter says the policy imposes unjustified burdens in the sponsorship process and leaves many prospective sponsors with an “untenable choice” of either leaving children in federal custody or coming forward and possibly exposing themselves or loved ones to immigration enforcement.

“Migrant children being subjected to lengthy, prison-like detention in federal tent cities is outrageous,” Madigan said. “The administration’s inhumane immigration policies are tearing apart families, traumatizing children and must stop.”

The Office of Refugee Resettlement entered an agreement earlier this year with ICE and Customs and Border Control to impose these requirements on prospective sponsors despite a lack of evidence that they would make children safer, according to the letter. Madigan and the other attorneys general said the requirements have resulted in immigration-related arrests of prospective sponsors and allege the true motive for collecting and sharing their information has been to detain and deport immigrants.

The policy has kept migrant children in unnecessarily prolonged federal custody and contributed to the number of children in detention ballooning fivefold since last year – to more than 13,000. These children have been left to languish in overburdened shelters, according to the letter, and the federal government is now dealing with capacity issues at these shelters by moving children to a makeshift tent city in Tornillo, Texas. The unlicensed tent city has been described as a prison-camp, with 20-person tents and military-style bunk beds, and Madigan and the other attorneys general said the policies that unnecessarily burden sponsorship will continue to increase the number of children in detention and the reliance on these unsuitable detention facilities.

In April 2018, the federal government announced a “zero tolerance” policy requiring the immediate separation of children from their parents and the criminal prosecution of adults who entered the U.S. without permission, including those seeking asylum. In June 2018, Madigan and a coalition of 18 attorneys general in filed a lawsuit against the Department of Justice, DHS and administration officials over their illegal and immoral policy of forcibly separating children from their families at the southern border, claiming the policy violates due process, equal protection and federal law, and has torn apart countless families.

Joining Madigan in signing the letter were state attorneys general from the following states: California, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.

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