

# American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™



## NYS AAP

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### NYS AAP

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July 2, 2018

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo:

We are writing to thank you for your work to publicly expose the danger to children's health and well-being that the current federal policy of Separating Children from their Families and Zero Tolerance is creating. But we are also asking you do more to forcefully encourage not only the timely reunification of families, but also to prevent the federal government from keeping reunited families in federal detention.

As pediatricians, we are acutely aware of the long term, negative impacts on brain development, emotional regulation, intellectual potential, and physical health that separation from a loving parent can impose on children. The current state of the more than 300 children possibly housed in New York State child welfare agencies concerns us greatly.

Although we know that these children housed in New York are not being physically, emotionally and environmentally abused as many children are in Texas and in federal detention facilities, the very fact that these children have been torn away from their parents is a serious threat to their health and development. Most of the children do not understand what has happened to them. They do not know where their parents are. And most feel bereft and abandoned. In addition, many children are beginning to feel betrayed by parents who have been unable to come and rescue them. This sense of betrayal has the potential to permanently damage these children both physically and emotionally for the rest of their lives. What the federal government is doing is state sponsored child abuse and it must be stopped now.

We know there is a recent court ruling demanding that the youngest children, those under 5, be reunited with their parents in 14 days, and older children within 30 days. We are asking you to work with us and the many state agencies and not for profits agencies in New York to make sure reunification happens on that time frame, or even sooner. We also want to be sure that the children leaving New York, and indeed all the children caught in this nefarious net of anti-immigration policy, once reunited with their parents, are not detained in inhumane and dangerous federal holding/detention facilities. Family detention simply re-traumatizes these children and families. As you know, there are many proven and safer ways, like ankle monitors for parents, to allow families to be together in the community and for the government to be sure that they show up for their asylum hearings.

The thousands of pediatricians across New York stand ready to help and support all efforts to reunify separated children and families. We are reaching out to our members in child welfare agencies and in city and state academic medical centers who may see some of these children in the clinic or emergency departments. We are also reaching out the legal assistance groups to offer our expertise in child health to support their court petitions on behalf of these children. Our goal is reunification now!

Please know you can call upon us at any time to help with the effort. But also know that we are watching and the clock is ticking. For every day that a child is separated from his or her parents that child's brain and body is suffering trauma. We have no time. The children have no time, for them every day of separation is a lifetime of grief and misery.

Let's work together to reunite these children with their parents now. And to assure that reunified families are not held in detention.

Sincerely,



Warren Seigel, MD, MBA, FSAM, FAAP  
District Chairperson, NYS AAP



Henry Neilley, MD, FAAP  
President, NYS AAP - Chapter 1



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