

Senator Amy Klobuchar  
302 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Al Franken  
309 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

July 16, 2014

Dear Senator Klobuchar and Senator Franken:

We, the undersigned immigration, civil and human rights, faith, labor and community organizations, urge you not to support the plan to expedite the deportation of Central American children to the dangers they escaped in their home countries. Immigration service providers in Minnesota already have seen a dramatic increase in children and families who have fled the region, including unaccompanied children and mothers with very small children who all made a perilous trip driven by fear of harm in their homelands. We know that you share our commitment to ensuring that children and families receive the protection of due process and humane treatment.

The administration's recent statements have placed far greater emphasis on deterrence of migration than on the importance of protection of children seeking safety. At a time when the region is confronted with a major humanitarian crisis, our nation cannot compromise on fundamental principles of compassion, fairness, and due process, nor on our international refugee protection obligations.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has found that almost 60 percent of children fleeing to the United States from Central America are asylum seekers.<sup>i</sup> The United States is not alone in seeing higher than normal migration flows – according to UNHCR, other countries in the region have experienced a sharp increase in the number of asylum applications filed by Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans since 2008. From 2008 to 2013, the number of such applications filed in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize increased by 712 percent.

We are deeply concerned that the administration will circumvent the protections of the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008 and remove the children apprehended at the border through a non-judicial process. Instead of affording these children proper screening for trafficking and persecution, as well as the opportunity to receive fair and full consideration of their legal claims before an immigration judge, the administration appears to propose to quickly deport them, without access to legal counsel, following cursory screenings that have already proven entirely inadequate to identify genuine refugee claims among Mexican children.<sup>ii</sup>

Congress gave consideration to the unique circumstances of children when it enacted the TVPRA. The law includes protections such as the facilitation of counsel and the appointment of

child advocates that help ensure that unaccompanied children from non-contiguous countries receive proper care and that their requests for asylum and other legal relief are processed fairly and in a way that is consistent with their age and development. As it stands, the proposed plan would appear to place at risk these existing legal protections, jeopardizing the lives of children seeking safety in the United States. Undermining due process and protection under the law is not the right answer, and certainly will not appease the criticisms of those who have been calling for more punitive and aggressive enforcement. The cost of pushing vulnerable children back into dangerous or deadly situations is simply too high.

Now is the time for America to demonstrate its international leadership and commitment to refugee protection and due process. We oppose any plan to amend the TVPRA to weaken the protections afforded to children from Central America, and we urge you to ensure that the rights and safety of these children are guaranteed.

Sincerely,

The Advocates for Human Rights  
American Immigration Lawyers Association – Minnesota/Dakotas Chapter  
Breaking Free  
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis  
Centro Campesino  
Children’s Defense Fund - Minnesota  
CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio-Latino Communities United in Service)  
El Santo Nino Jesus (Hispanic ministry of the, Episcopal Church in Minnesota  
The Family Partnership  
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota  
Immigration Team of the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ  
Interfaith Coalition on Immigration  
ISALAH  
ISALAH Core Team, Mayflower Church United Church of Christ, Minneapolis  
Jewish Community Action  
Latino Communications Network  
Latino Voices  
League of Latino Educators  
The Link  
Mesa Latina  
Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid  
The Minneapolis Foundation  
Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation, AFL-CIO  
Minnesota AFL-CIO  
Minnesota Catholic Conference  
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault  
Minnesota Council of Churches  
MIRAC (Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee)  
NAVIGATE  
PAVSA (Program Against Violence and Sexual Assault – Duluth)

Pillsbury United Communities  
Saint Joan of Arc Catholic Community  
Saint Paul Regional Labor Federation  
SEIU Minnesota State Council  
UFCW 1189  
West Area Labor Council Minnesota AFL-CIO  
Women's Foundation of Minnesota

**Individual Faith & Religious Leaders:**

Bishop Thomas M. Aitken, NE MN Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Duluth  
Bishop Bruce R. Ough, Dakotas-Minnesota Area, The United Methodist Church  
The Rev. Susan M. Moss, Episcopal Diocese of MN  
Rev. Paul Erickson, Assistant to the Bishop for Evangelical Mission, St. Paul Synod, ELCA  
Rev. Mark Kuether, The Congregational United Church of Christ, Detroit Lakes  
Rev. Wendy Jerome, Unitarian Universalist  
Revs. Patrick & Luisa Cabello Hansel, Pastors, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Mpls  
Rev. Sharon Prestemon, Conference Minister, Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ  
Rev. John R. Guttermann, Covenant Minister, United Church of Christ, New Brighton MN  
Steve Clemens, Community of St. Martin, Minneapolis  
Pastor Jay M. Carlson, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Minneapolis  
Bob Oehrig, Executive Director, Arrive Ministries  
Rev. Sarah Campbell, Team Lead Minister Mayflower Church, United Church of Christ  
Rev. Emily Goldthwaite Fries, Associate Minister, Mayflower Church, United Church of Christ

Conversations with Friends (Minnesota's Detained Immigrant Visitor Program) and its visitors/supporters: Mary Engen, Minneapolis; Darrell Schmidt, Minnetonka; Diana Schansberg, Otsego; Mary Lorentz, Saint Paul; Mary Hopkins, Saint Paul; Ed Rowley, Rochester; Jack T Chandler, St. Anthony; Steve Kramer, Plymouth.

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<sup>i</sup> UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Children on the Run: Unaccompanied Children Leaving Central America and Mexico and the need for International Protection*, 13 March 2014, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/532180c24.html>

<sup>ii</sup> See, e.g. Betsy Cavendish and Maru Cortazar, Appleseed, *Children at the Border: the Screening, Protection and Repatriation of Unaccompanied Mexican Minors* (2011), available at <http://appleseednetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Children-At-The-Border1.pdf>.