



Family Separation in the Sunshine State:

“Action Steps” for Florida

The separation of families can have a long-term, negative impact on both families and the State. The following “Action Steps” are recommendations for the child welfare system. These steps will assure that parental rights are not limited or neglected as a result of the parent’s federal immigration proceedings. Only by working together, on a local and state level, can we assure that children of undocumented parents will not lose their family bonds. The eleven “Action Steps” incorporate best practices used at the federal level as well as recommendations designed in order to strengthen the capacity of child welfare staff to complete their mandate.

1. Create an intake code for the cases of children that enter foster care due to parental detention or deportation in order to track this subgroup of children and ease the implementation of protocols unique to these cases.
2. Create a centralized data bank and designated staff member, serving as the Communications Liaison, similar to ICE’s Child Welfare Coordinator and Field Point of Contact staff positions (“Detention and Removal of Alien Parents”, 2017) in each of Florida’s Department of Children and Family (DCF) regions. They will serve as the Central Liaison to manage communication between the caseworker, the child and the immigrant parent to ensure that permanency plans will be followed and reunification achieved, even when parents have been detained or deported.
 - a. Train Communications Liaisons to use the Online Detainee Locator System to stay abreast of parental whereabouts within the detention system to assure continuous communication.
 - b. Institute a system whereby the Communications Liaison is responsible for contacting pertinent foreign consulates whenever the child of an immigrant parent, who has been detained or deported, enters foster care.
 - c. Orient Consulate representatives of available family resources to assist with their adherence to permanency plans.
 - d. Ensure that Consulates assist in the preparation of legal passports for a child’s potential travel for reunification in their parent’s home country.
3. Create a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and ICE to ensure that parents are present (even via video conference) during Department of Children and Families hearings as outlined in statutes. Consulates serve to support the rights of their citizens in this process.
 - a. Videoconference options include Skype, Facetime, Signal, WhatsApp and other professional services.
 - b. Create a procedure or protocol to establish the most reliable means of contact and information with parents as they move through the system.

4. Request that child welfare intake worker's protocol establishes whether parents who are detained or deported have a prepared Power of Attorney or have an expressed plan to present to the CPI or Judge at the DCF hearing.
5. Require that Foster Parents assist children in maintaining contact with a parent who is in detention or in the parent's home country as supported by the Adoption and Safe Families Act Memorandum.
 - a. Set up scheduled conferences as part of permanency plans.
6. Prioritize the expansion of multilingual child welfare agency staff and Foster Parents.
7. Create a Task Force charged with identifying policy changes to support protocols and systems to facilitate family reunification for children of immigrant parents.
8. Establish Community Liaisons (similar to these through DCF's Refugee Services Program), including immigrant advocacy organizations, to reduce the strain on child welfare agencies and strengthen support for Foster Parents (Circuit 10, n.d.).
9. Increase cultural competency of child welfare agency workers and Foster Parents with strategies to address the trauma facing children of deportees.
 - a. Facilitate on-going, mandated trainings, workshops and evaluations to support this process.
10. Honor the existing prioritization of family reunification with parents as the permanency plan for all children, regardless of the immigration, detention or deportation status of the parent.
11. Partner with Guidance Counselors in the school system to encourage immigrant families to develop a Power of Attorney and engage Guidance Counselors to support students in foster care whose parent has been detained or deported.

Family Separation in the Sunshine State is a collaborative project under the coordination of the Rural Women's Health.

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