

We, the United States Breastfeeding Committee and the undersigned organizations, stand strongly for all families and fights for their health, safety, and well-being through policy, systems, and environmental change. We implore the Administration to reverse its ["zero tolerance" border control policy](#) to [deter](#) families who come to our southern border seeking protection and entry and also end the separation of detained families, as this practice is traumatic to children and their parents/caregivers. We also urge the Administration to appropriately staff all areas where children are being detained and expedite the reunification of the babies and children already separated from their parents.

Early childhood is an extremely sensitive period in human development. There is overwhelming evidence that [nurturing by parents and caregivers](#) is vital for health and development, and when children experience separation and other adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), the ensuing neurological damage leads to serious, long term negative impact on emotional, physical, and mental health. In the past six weeks alone, U.S. Department of Human Health and Services (DHHS) statistics show more than 2,300 children, including breastfeeding infants, have been forcibly separated from their families at the southern U.S. border.

Children who have already endured harrowing experiences in their countries and have undertaken dangerous, arduous journeys with their families are re-traumatized at the U.S. border, when they are ripped from their families. With a [system not equipped](#) to handle such young children, many children are currently incarcerated in cages, without adequate staff to care for them.

The reality is horrifying. The small number of staff supervising large numbers of children are not permitted to [hold and comfort](#) the grief-stricken children. Older children suffering the trauma of separation are [taking care of the younger ones among them](#). Parents are being deported to their countries, while their children remain here, with no official procedures in place for reunification. The sudden and unexpected separation of infants and children from parents greatly exacerbates the risk of abrupt breastfeeding cessation and [the health concerns that go along with it](#).

Human milk is always clean, requires no fuel, water, or electricity, and is available, even in the direst circumstances. Continuing breastfeeding or re-lactating is the [safest infant feeding option in emergencies and humanitarian crises](#) where unsanitary conditions and lack of access to clean water can lead to diarrhea, respiratory, and other infections—a leading cause of infant and child death. When mother's own milk or pasteurized donor human milk are unavailable, families in crisis need support in the use of safely prepared infant formula. Preventing nursing infants and children from breastfeeding intensifies this humanitarian crisis, and will have additional serious health consequences for these infants, toddlers, and their lactating parents.

There is [no U.S. law](#) requiring the [separation of parents and children](#) at the border. There is [no evidence](#) that doing so changes immigration or migration. Forcibly separating infants and children from caregivers and blocking families seeking asylum from requesting refugee protections is a violation of children's rights and international law. **Refusing families who are escaping poverty, war, gang and domestic violence in their countries from lawfully requesting asylum, is akin to barring individuals from fleeing a burning building.**

The current situation [lacks transparency and safeguards](#), and it is unacceptable. Currently, child advocates, health professionals, [lawmakers](#), and journalists are prevented from visiting the facilities and examining conditions under which the children are detained. As current facilities reach overflow levels,

tent cities are being erected in the blazing Texas heat for the specific purpose of housing children, and the Administration is sending babies and toddlers to detention facilities in four locations in Texas.

President Trump has signed an Executive Order titled "[Affording Congress an Opportunity to Address Family Separation](#)." The order states that it is the policy of the Administration to rigorously enforce U.S. immigration laws and specifies that the Administration will detain immigrant families together where appropriate and consistent with law and available resources. The order will find ways to hold parents and children together at the border instead of separating them, albeit for indefinite periods. As long as prosecutions continue, parents and families will remain at risk of separation.

Our nation's grim practice of separating families is not new. From slavery, separation of Native American families, internment of American citizens of Japanese ancestry, to the mass incarceration of today, communities of color continue to be systematically dehumanized. Once again, we urge the Administration to reverse its "zero tolerance" border control policy and also end the separation of detained families impacted by border control policy, as this practice is traumatic to children and their parents/caregivers. We also implore the Administration to appropriately staff all areas where children are being detained and expedite the reunification of the babies and children already separated from their parents.

United States Breastfeeding Committee

National

Breastfeeding in Combat Boots
Every Mother, Inc.
HealthConnect One
Healthy Children Project, Inc.
Holistic Lactation
Human Milk Banking Association of North America
La Leche League of the United States of America, Inc.
Lactation Education Resources
Mom2Mom Global
Reaching Our Sisters Everywhere, Inc
Women-Inspired Systems' Enrichment (WISE)

La Coalición para la Lactancia Materna de Puerto Rico
District of Columbia Breastfeeding Coalition
Florida Breastfeeding Coalition, Inc.
Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition of Hawaii
Kansas Breastfeeding Coalition
Kentuckiana Lactation Improvement Coalition
Lactation Improvement Network of Kentucky
Lactation Resources of Vermont, Inc.
Michigan Breastfeeding Network
The Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition
Nebraska Breastfeeding Coalition
North Carolina Breastfeeding Coalition
NYC Breastfeeding Leadership Council, Inc.
Wisconsin Breastfeeding Coalition
Vermont Breastfeeding Network

State/Local

Alaska Breastfeeding Coalition
Appalachian Breastfeeding Network
Breastfeeding Coalition of Delaware
Breastfeeding Coalition of Shohomish County
Breastfeeding Coalition of Washington
Breastfeeding Hawai'i
BreastfeedLA
Bronx Breastfeeding Coalition
California Breastfeeding Coalition