



June 20, 2018

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

On behalf of the American College of Physicians (ACP), I am writing to express our support for legislation that you recently introduced, S. 3036, The Keep Families Together Act, which will help ensure that children are not separated from their parents when families unlawfully cross over the border into the United States. This legislation would end a new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) zero tolerance policy that separates children from their parents if they unlawfully cross the border into the United States. We urge the Senate to consider and pass this measure without further delay so that families remain intact and children do not experience the additional trauma of separation from their parents at or near our border.

ACP is the largest medical specialty organization and the second largest physician group in the United States, representing 152,000 internal medicine physicians (internists), related subspecialists, and medical students. Internal medicine physicians are specialists who apply scientific knowledge and clinical expertise to the diagnosis, treatment, and compassionate care of adults across the spectrum from health to complex illness.

S. 3036 would prohibit a federal agent or officer from separating a child from his or her parent or legal guardian, at or near the port of entry or within 100 miles of the border of the United States unless the child is in danger of abuse or neglect at the hands of a parent, or is otherwise at risk of harm, as stipulated in the bill. It would also mandate that (DHS) provide to any parent or legal guardian who was separated from the child, information regarding the child's monthly activities, their education and health, and any changes to the child's immigration status.

ACP has voiced strong objections to the current DHS zero tolerance policy that requires that all unlawful border crossers be referred to the Department of Justice for prosecution as a misdemeanor of illegal entry, including parents seeking asylum from persecution who enter the U.S. with their children. This policy separates families by treating "children as unaccompanied minors" and sending parents into separate detention facilities administered by the federal government. Children separated from their parents at the border will endure childhood trauma and negative health consequences from this experience that will last their entire lifetime. Separating a child from his or her parents triggers a level of stress consistent with trauma. Families seeking refuge in the U.S. already endure emotional and physical stress, and separating family members from each other only serves to dramatically exacerbate that stress.

We appreciate your introduction of this legislation to end this DHS policy that harms children and divides families. We look forward to working with you to move this bill forward in the Senate and through the Congress. Should you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact Brian Buckley in our office at 202-261-4543 or by email at bbuckley@acponline.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ana Maria Lopez".

Ana Maria Lopez, MD, MPH, FACP
President