



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JOE STRAUS

SPEAKER

June 19, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

The images and reports of innocent, terrified children being taken away from their parents are of grave concern to me, many of the people I represent, and millions of Americans. While I understand that the approach of separating parents did not begin with your presidency, it has been expanded by several actions of your administration, including the announcement of General Sessions' "zero tolerance" policy in April. Many of us are especially concerned here in Texas because thousands of children are being housed in our state and in facilities that our state agencies license. In fact, many of these facilities have in recent weeks requested variances to exceed their licensed capacities.

I know that members of Congress from both parties have proposed various ways to address this issue in the form of legislation, and while I applaud their attention to the problem, I also know that congressional action often does not come quickly. In order to at least begin addressing this issue, there is no need to wait for Congress to act. That's why I respectfully ask that you move immediately to rescind the policy that General Sessions announced in April and any other policies that have led to an increase in family separations at the border.

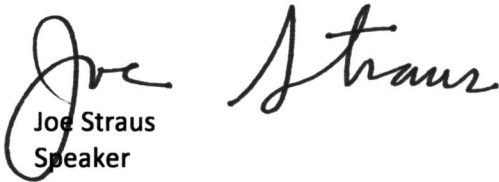
There is no federal law requiring the separation of children and parents at the border. While it is certainly true that there have been family separations under previous Presidents, General Sessions' decision to criminally prosecute all adults trying to enter the United States has caused the number of separations to increase. None of us wants to imagine the fear that overcomes young children who are forced out of their parents' arms, which adds to the trauma that they have often faced in their countries of origin. Furthermore, numerous studies have documented the negative effects of forcible separation on children, including poor health outcomes, anxiety, delayed development, and mental illness. This policy is worsening the many problems that already plague our immigration system, and it is important to recognize the critical difference between those who come to our country seeking asylum from very dangerous situations in their home countries, and those who enter the United States as part of a criminal network or in order to harm our citizens.

You have publicly suggested that your administration may end these policies if congressional Democrats agree to some of your other border security objectives and positions. But it is wrong to use these scared, vulnerable children as a negotiating tool. Their suffering should also not be used to deter illegal

immigration. I believe it's important to start by halting the administration policies that have expanded forced family separations, and then go about the work of reforming our immigration system and protecting public safety along the border and across our country.

Please listen to the growing number of Americans, faith leaders and elected officials from both parties who are voicing our concerns about this growing crisis. This is not a binary choice between rampant crime and tearing families apart. In light of the potential harm being inflicted on these children and the ambiguity about their status after they're removed from these facilities, I ask that you please immediately rescind directives that have resulted in the increase in separations of children from their migrant parents.

Sincerely,



Joe Straus
Speaker

CC: Members of the Texas Congressional Delegation