

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 16, 2018

The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Alex M. Azar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Nielsen and Secretary Azar:

We write regarding the safety and security of young children immigrating to the United States. Secretary Nielsen recently appeared before the U.S. Senate and testified that immigrant parents and children who present themselves at U.S. ports of entry to request asylum will not be separated. Despite Secretary Nielsen's testimony, a number of media outlets have reported instances where parents and children seeking asylum at a port of entry have been separated.

The *Washington Post* recently reported that a Honduran mother who sought asylum by presenting herself to immigration authorities at an international bridge in Brownsville, Texas, was separated from her 18-month-old child. The mother was not reunited with the child for months. An ongoing case in the Southern District of California presents a similar story, where a Congolese mother was separated from her six-year-old daughter for more than four months despite seeking asylum on grounds of religious persecution at the San Ysidro Port of Entry. These accounts and others like them concern us.

In light of this, we request responses to the following questions:

1. When families present themselves at a legal port of entry seeking asylum, are children separated from their parents?
  - a. If yes, how many children have been separated from their parents when seeking asylum at a port of entry and for how long do these separations last?
  - b. What DHS policy or legal theory provides the justification for these separations?
  - c. Are these separations being carried out to deter people from seeking lawful asylum in the United States?
2. Please describe DHS procedures for the processing of asylum applications by parents with children who present themselves at legal ports of entry.

3. Are there any existing or pending procedures to keep parents regularly informed of the welfare of their children and to help them re-establish contact and custody at the end of any separation period?

a. If so, please provide us with a copy of these procedures.

4. Are training protocols in place for the personnel who process, transport, or otherwise care for separated children, to make the separation process less traumatic?

a. If so, please provide us with a copy of these protocols.

It is critical that Congress fully understands how our nation's laws are being implemented on the ground, especially when the well-being of young children is at stake. We look forward to your prompt response to this inquiry.

Sincerely,



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Jeff Flake  
United States Senator