

ANTI-CHILD AND ANTI-FAMILY: HOW THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION IS TARGETING THE MOST VULNERABLE AMONG US

The Trump administration is promoting policies that [harm children](#), despite [claims to the contrary](#). Children, especially immigrant children, pay the price when an administration prioritizes amassing wealth, increasing enforcement and militarization, and separating families, over protecting and respecting basic human rights outlined in law. At the same time, both federal and state governments are redefining childhood to suit their ends, reducing protections, and subjecting young teens to adult consequences for political ends.

The administration's policies hurt children, especially immigrant children, in the following ways:

1. **Putting children as young as 14 at risk of [extraordinary rendition](#).** Under the administration's invocation of the Alien Enemies Act, the government can arrest and deport [children as young as 14](#) without a court hearing if the government believes the young person is affiliated with a gang. The government does not have to prove any misconduct – allegations can be as cursory as having a tattoo or certain item of clothing. Prisons like CECOT in El Salvador, where the U.S. government sent [238 migrants](#) without any opportunity to challenge their forced removal, [are not fit for anyone](#), and certainly not a child. [Numerous courts](#) have held that the Alien Enemies Act cannot be used in this way, but the fact that the administration would allow for the possibility of sending 14-year-olds to maximum security prisons in third countries is a new low for anti-immigrant politics.
2. **Rolling back state labor protections for children.** While Members of Congress have bemoaned [migrant child labor exploitation](#) and demanded solutions to this enduring problem, state governments have been systematically rolling back long-standing child labor protections. In Florida, Republicans have proposed [bills](#) that, if passed, would allow [children as young as 14 to work overnight shifts without breaks](#). This and other proposed changes are in direct response to the state's [migrant labor shortage](#) resulting from anti-immigrant federal and state laws. Back in 2023, Iowa passed a [law](#) allowing children as young as 14 to work in meat packing plants and teenagers as young as 16 to work as bartenders. In February of this year, Iowa passed another [law](#) reducing the fines for businesses who violate child labor laws. It is hard to miss the irony here – on one hand, politicians argue for an end to protections for migrant children because they might face child labor exploitation, while on the other, eviscerate child labor protections at the state level.
3. **Requiring children 14 and older to register with the Department of Homeland Security.** The Trump administration has resurrected a [provision](#) of immigration law that requires all noncitizens to [register and be fingerprinted by DHS](#) and for people over age 18 to carry proof of registration with them at all times. Children as young as 14 are required to register, independent of their parents, even though they likely had no control over their migration journey and may not even have the information required to complete the registration form. Yet, they could face the very adult consequence of criminal charges, detention, and deportation if they fail to register correctly. Those who have entered the country with visas, parole, or as unaccompanied children 14 and older in ORR custody are automatically registered. In the past, such registrations were used to round people of Japanese descent up and send them to [internment camps](#). Today, registration requirements could be used to [detain, deport, and potentially criminally prosecute](#) immigrants.

4. **Stripping funding for legal representation for unaccompanied migrant children.** The Trump administration cancelled the legal services contract held by the Acacia Center for Justice at the end of March, effectively stripping funding for legal services for unaccompanied children of all ages and requiring [more than 26,000 children](#) to either pay for a private attorney or represent themselves in court. Without government-funded lawyers, [children as young as five years old](#) have appeared in court alone. While the government is always represented in immigration court, many children without lawyers will be returned to the dangerous situations they escaped.
5. **Detaining, deporting, and disappearing parents and family members.** The Trump administration has made it its mission to conduct the [largest mass deportation operation](#) in American history, without concern for the resulting family separations. Family separation and family detention are traumatizing for everyone involved, but especially for children. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) considers parental separation an [adverse childhood event](#) (ACE) that can cause life-long harm. There is nothing in a child's best interests about [deporting a child's parents](#).
6. **Putting children of all ages at risk of mandatory detention.** The [Laken Riley Act](#) (LRA), which was passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump earlier this year, requires mandatory detention for anyone suspected of being undocumented and accused of or charged with theft or assault-related charges. While [experts agree](#) that children should never be subjected to mandatory detention, the Laken Riley Act includes no age restrictions and could apply to children of any age. At the same time, children's parents, sponsors, and family members only need to be accused of petty theft such as shoplifting – not even charged or convicted – to be detained indefinitely away from their children.
7. **Ignoring systemic sexual abuse allegations and neglecting the protection of children in government custody.** Under the Biden administration, the [Department of Justice \(DOJ\)](#) sued [Southwest Key Programs](#) (SWK) – a network of shelters for unaccompanied children in Texas, Arizona, and California – for allegations of the sexual abuse of children since 2015. Soon after President Trump came into office, the DOJ dropped the case. Instead of pursuing justice for these children, the government used the opportunity to advance its anti-immigrant agenda. All children, including migrant children, deserve protection – including from the people who should be protecting them – and reparations for irreparable damage that has already been done.
8. **Considering cuts to programs like Medicaid and SNAP.** The House reconciliation bill includes billions of dollars of [cuts](#) to essential programs like Medicaid and SNAP. Medicaid and SNAP provide health care and food to [at least 34 million children](#) in the United States, making it the [largest age group](#) served by Medicaid. Children from [lower socio-economic status families](#), [children with disabilities and complex health needs](#), and [children in the child welfare system](#) would suffer the most if Medicaid and SNAP benefits were reduced. Access to health care and food should not be a partisan issue. Children, regardless of immigration status, should be treated with dignity.

CHILDREN DESERVE CARE AND PROTECTION, NOT CRUELTY