



2026 Spring Impact Report

The Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights

Dear Young Center Champion,

As you have stood shoulder to shoulder with us over the past year, I know that you have seen what our immigrant communities are facing. The harm is real, and in the first months of 2026, it has only intensified.

The battles we have faced to protect our communities have reminded me that what matters most is not only the hard and fast wins, but the steady work of bearing witness and bringing to light what is happening to children in federal custody, in child welfare systems, at the border, and in our own neighborhoods.

In the past year, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) sent more children into federal detention facilities for unaccompanied children than in the previous four years combined. That escalation is the direct result of ICE interior enforcement actions in local communities where the unexpected arrest of a parent or caregiver renders a child unaccompanied.

These family separations require urgent advocacy for children who should never be in detention in the first place. Kids now remain separated from the anchors of their childhood for more than six months – far from familiar voices, favorite foods, and the comfort of their daily routines. **They deserve to be back home.** Back in their classrooms, playing with their neighbors, and sleeping beneath blankets that smell like home.

At the heart of this moment is the fight to protect family unity.

You and I know that children belong with their families. And yet, we continue to watch our immigration system continue to violate this basic human right in communities across the country.

Family separation is not an unintended consequence of enforcement. It has become a deliberate strategy designed to destabilize our communities, instill fear in families, and leave children languishing in government custody far from home.

Since January, we have seen children remain in custody even after being approved for release. Safe and vetted caregivers have faced arrest and deportation while attempting to reunify and bring children home. Families separated at the border in 2018 have been re-detained a second time, reliving trauma they should never have had to endure to begin with.

It is unacceptable.

The headlines coming out of Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Minneapolis, Phoenix, and Texas are not distant threats. They are moments of violence unfolding on our own street corners, in courtrooms, and in detention facilities where our Child Advocates sit beside children each week. And the pace is accelerating.

At the Young Center, we are meeting this moment with coordinated resolve across detention facilities, federal courtrooms, in communities and coalitions, and in the halls of Congress. In these first months of 2026 alone, we have expanded litigation capacity, supported children pursuing release to family when dangerous policies delayed their reunification, continued our narrative change campaign *All Children Belong*, strengthened partnerships across disability and reproductive justice movements, and fielded urgent requests from child welfare and community partners navigating enforcement actions involving children.

Child Advocate Program

In the first months of 2026, our Child Advocate Program (CAP) has continued to operate at full capacity, responding to increasingly complex cases and longer detention stays. Young Center volunteers, attorneys, and social workers continue to provide steady, child-centered advocacy to more than 1,400 new children each year in some of the most challenging environments children face.



386%

increase in children's average length of detention since Jan 2025

20%

approx. increase in Young Center caseloads

Policy

Our policy program continues to center a core truth: every child deserves the opportunity to thrive, regardless of where they or their parents come from.

Even as federal policy advocacy pathways have narrowed, our team has pivoted to reach constituents directly, building public momentum and shaping public understanding of how immigration enforcement affects children.

Progress towards this vision includes:

- ★ **Expanding partnerships** with local, state, and national organizations to challenge harmful proposals and advance child-centered policies, while building a shared advocacy space where organizations can strategize, collaborate, and advocate for immigrant children together.
- ★ **Continuing our narrative change work** by amplifying children's stories and engaging with communities directly in states including AZ, CO, GA, IL, MI, NY, PA, VA.
- ★ **Investing in health justice work** that supports pregnant and parenting youth using lessons to inform stronger health and immigration policy advocacy.

TAP Co-Director Shaina Simenas, left, and Chief Programs Officer Jennifer Nagda, right, speaking to the Young Center community in NY.



Technical Assistance Program

ICE has arrested thousands of adults who are parents or primary caregivers, and the ripple effect is profoundly destabilizing. Many are detained or deported without the opportunity to make plans for their children.

“ It’s just really hard to understand without even knowing how many parents are being detained and separated from their children to then know what happens to their children afterwards.

Shaina Simenas, Co-Director of TAP

Throughout early 2026, TAP has continued responding to our community’s needs by:

- ★ **Supporting reunification efforts** for families separated through immigration enforcement actions, providing guidance directly to parents in detention centers across the country.
- ★ **Collaborating on cases across Young Center programs** to strengthen advocacy in complex cases involving reunifications across state lines and international borders.

Litigation

In response to rapidly shifting policies that threaten to dismantle protections for immigrant children, our litigation work has reinforced foundational protections for children and families, with milestones including:

- ★ **Expanding our litigation team** with a new senior litigation attorney, increasing our capacity for rapid response advocacy and litigation support for children subjected to harm in federal custody.
- ★ **Filing an *amicus* brief in federal courts** defending the [Flores Settlement Agreement](#), a landmark safeguard that sets national minimum standards for the humane treatment, placement, and release of detained children.

In a climate of lawlessness and cruelty, these litigation efforts center the experiences of children and their families before courts and seek to hold the government accountable for following the law.

Behind every intervention is the same commitment: to ensure that a child’s best interests are not erased in the rush of immigration enforcement. To bear witness. To accompany. To stand steady when the ground shifts.

And I want you to know that your courage fuels ours. On the hardest days, we remember that people like you are standing alongside us and the children at the heart of this work. Thank you!

With gratitude and determination,



Gladis Molina Alt
Executive Director

As advocates for children's safety & freedom, the time to act is now.

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Volunteer.


Join our community of volunteers who advocate for unaccompanied immigrant children.


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Reclaim the narrative.

Follow us on socials and elevate our messaging, amplify children's stories, and receive action alerts.

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Organize your community.




We need your voice to educate your community. Host an event, a fundraiser, or lend your skills.

Click the logo above to join us.

Children belong with their families.

Help us protect that basic human right. Your support strengthens family reunification efforts, policy advocacy, and the steady presence of Child Advocates standing beside children in detention. Give today.



 Give with confidence

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