January 27, 2016

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA), I am writing to express our concerns about the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) recent deportations of Central American children and their parents. Given that your administration has prided itself on encouraging comprehensive immigration reform, we ask that you carefully consider the potential for an adverse impact of these deportations on the mental health of the children and families involved.

APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States. Our mission is to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people’s lives. This includes addressing the challenges faced by immigrants and their communities. We have members and affiliates across the United States, many of whom serve immigrant youth and adults in a wide range of settings, including schools, community centers, hospitals and refugee resettlement centers. As psychologists, we are concerned that deportation has the potential to cause mental health problems for those deported, as well as for those remaining in this country. It has been well documented in the scientific literature that sudden and unexpected family separation can cause emotional trauma in children. The effects can persist well into adulthood.

Generally, mass migrations are not random and result from crises such as wars, economic disasters and violence. The targets of recent deportations have been mostly children and families from Central American countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador, which are among the most violent in the world. This violence in Central America is the main cause for immigration from these countries to the United States.

Furthermore, immigrants to the United States, even those who are not fleeing violence, face challenges such as acculturation, prejudice and discrimination, which can lead to trauma symptoms and other mental health problems. Psychological research demonstrates the importance of evidence-based mental health care in supporting immigrants. For more detailed applicable psychological research, and for the leading psychological comprehensive study on mental health and immigration, see the recent APA report, Crossroads: The Psychology of Immigration in the New Century.
We wish to thank you for your attention to our concerns related to this challenging issue. If we can be of any further assistance, please contact Serena Dávila (sdavila@apa.org or 202-336-6061) in APA’s Public Interest Government Relations Office.

Sincerely,

Cynthia D. Belar, Ph.D., ABPP
Interim Chief Executive Officer

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iii (Jordan, 2015)