



National Task Force  
to End Sexual and  
Domestic Violence Against Women

## **Stop Locking Up Immigrant Families who are Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence**

October 22, 2014 – please forward widely

Many of the women and their children arriving at the border, primarily from three Central American countries, have come to the United States fleeing horrific domestic and sexual violence. They have undertaken incredibly dangerous journeys because their abusers are able to commit horrible atrocities without accountability and they cannot obtain protection from the violence in their home countries. Compounding this trauma, many of the women and children fleeing violence are then re-assaulted as they travel to or in the United States or in the family detention centers, where they receive little or no domestic violence or sexual assault counseling or other services.

As we recognize Domestic Violence Awareness Month, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act, it is disgraceful that the Department of Homeland Security is re-traumatizing victims by jailing them in prison-like detention centers, even when they have been found to have credible fear of persecution or qualify for other forms of immigration status.

**IT'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH. TELL YOUR [SENATORS](#) & [REPRESENTATIVES](#) TO STOP LOCKING UP VICTIMS FLEEING DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE!**

**ACTION: CALL OR EMAIL YOUR [SENATORS](#) & [REPRESENTATIVES](#) AND TELL THEM OUR GOVERNMENT MUST STOP DETAINING IMMIGRANT VICTIMS FLEEING DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE, AND USE ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION INSTEAD,**

and

**CALL THE WHITE HOUSE COMMENT LINE AT 1-888-907-5441 AND TELL THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION TO END FAMILY DETENTION IMMEDIATELY**

Suggested message:

*“Women and children fleeing horrible abuse in Central America should not be re-traumatized by jailing them in prison like-conditions. Rather than increase the use of detention centers, families should be released through community-based alternatives to detention programs that have proven to be effective, more humane and less costly than institutional detention. Those in detention should receive counseling and support services from outside advocates not tied to immigration enforcement. This will enable them to access the sexual and domestic violence support they need to address the trauma, and legal counsel to help navigate the complex immigration system.”*

**Background:** Since June 2014, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has increased the number of family detention beds from roughly 80 beds to more than 1,200 beds, first at the Artesia Center in New Mexico and subsequently at the Karnes County Center in Texas. Currently, the 1,200 mothers and children housed in the family detention centers are primarily fleeing three countries in Central America that have among the highest levels of violence in the world. The vast majority of these women and children are fleeing domestic, sexual, and gang-violence, and have suffered experiences that would probably qualify them for asylum or other forms of protection (such as “U” crime victim, or “T” trafficking visas) for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, or Special Immigrant Juvenile status.

Even though migration from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras has decreased significantly over the past few months, the Obama Administration continues to invest hundreds of millions of dollars to build new detention centers and expand existing facilities specifically for family detention, such as another 2,400 bed facility in Dilley, Texas, to detain women and their children in jail-like facilities.

***Family detention is a harmful and re-traumatizing setting for survivors of abuse***

The vast majority of these women fleeing rampant violence in Central America are survivors of domestic or sexual violence who are seeking refuge. Under U.S. and international law, it is important to respond to this crisis in a humanitarian manner. Detention in jail-like facilities re-traumatizes victims of violence, and children in particular. Reports indicate that the children detained at Artesia have experienced weight loss, gastro-intestinal problems, and suicidal thoughts. In addition, detention undermines healthy parenting and critical family bonds that are critical for victims and children to overcome the abuse and trauma that they have experienced.

Furthermore, family detention impedes access to advocacy and counseling to help victims address the trauma they have experienced, as well as legal assistance to help them navigate legal options that might provide protections from further abuse if they are deported, such as asylum, and other protections under U.S. and international law.

Alternatives to detention, such as community support programs, are humane, effective, and less costly than detention. Nonetheless, though family detention costs \$266 a day, compared to alternatives that can cost as little as 70 cents to \$17 per day, the Administration is charging forward to expand family detention.

Additionally, there are reports of women in these detention centers experiencing ongoing sexual abuse at the hands of male guards, in violation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). A [complaint](#) has been filed with the Department of Justice calling for a thorough investigation and swift response.

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