

The Honorable Alex Azar
Secretary, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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The Honorable Kirstjen M. Nielsen
Secretary of Homeland Security
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The Honorable Jeff Sessions
Attorney General
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The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker of the House
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The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) is the national medical specialty organization representing more than 9,000 physicians who are specialists in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R). PM&R physicians, also known as physiatrists, treat a wide variety of medical conditions affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles, and tendons. PM&R physicians evaluate and treat injuries, illnesses, and disability, and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans. Physiatrists utilize cutting-edge as well as time-tested treatments to maximize function and quality of life.

The constant goal underlying each physiatrist's treatment for this wide variety of medical conditions is maximizing function and quality of life. As advocates for the specialty, and the patient population we serve, we understand the detrimental effects of institutionalization and civil marginalization experienced by people with disability. We are deeply concerned by the government's recent practice of separating over 2,300¹ children from their families at the U.S. Southern Border and the lack of a plan to reunite them. We believe this will

¹ Hurdles facing parents and children separated at U.S. border. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-reunification-explain/hurdles-facing-parents-and-children-separated-at-us-border-idUSKBN1JF39I>. Last updated on June 19, 2018. Accessed on June 22, 2018.

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have a long-lasting effect on childhood development, functionality, and quality of life lasting into their maturity and adulthood.

AAPM&R recognizes the June 20, 2018 Executive Order, *Affording Congress an Opportunity to Address Family Separation*, ended the policy of separating immigrant children from their families upon their family members' incarceration. However, AAPM&R is deeply concerned about the fact that the Order does not include a concrete and clear plan to reunite the already separated children with their families. AAPM&R implores all members of the government, in the administration and in Congress, to expeditiously create and publicly announce such a plan.

AAPM&R is concerned for the health of these children and the lasting effects separation can cause, including but not limited to post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, an inability to form attachment, and slower speech and motor skill development.² With such dire consequences for healthy children, it is particularly devastating to consider the lasting effects on those with disabilities kept in border detention facilities. As of June 20th, it is known that there is a 10-year old girl with Downs Syndrome being detained in a McAllen, Texas facility.³ Another young child, Matheus da Silva Bastos, who suffers from severe epilepsy and autism, was separated from his grandmother in El Paso.⁴ These two children are just known examples of the detained disabled children, but there are likely many more diagnosed or undiagnosed disabled children who require regular and specialized care. AAPM&R is concerned about access to health care and social services and the effects this detainment will have on these especially vulnerable children, including lasting repercussions on their already strained function and quality of life.

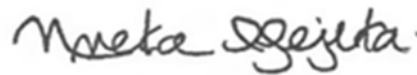
² Dr. Colleen Kraft explains the impact of the family separation. MSN news. Available at <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/good-news/dr-colleen-kraft-explains-the-impact-of-the-family-separation-policy/vp-AAyYoi>. Last updated on June 21, 2018. Accessed on June 20, 2018.

³ Chavez, N. 10-year-old girl with Down Syndrome held at border detention center, Mexico says. CNN. Available at <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/20/health/mexico-girl-down-syndrome-temporary-shelter/index.html>. Last updated on June 20, 2018. Accessed on June 20, 2018.

⁴ Aguilar, J. A grandmother seeking asylum at the border was separated from her grandson. It's been 10 months. Texas Tribune. Available at <https://www.texastribune.org/2018/06/13/immigrant-child-asylum-disabilities-separated-grandmother-border/>. Last updated on June 13, 2018. Accessed on June 22, 2018.

While we acknowledge the difficulty in doing so, AAPM&R encourages the administration to expeditiously and publicly put forth a plan as to how these children will be reunited with their parents. Additionally, AAPM&R encourages Congress to work together to pass legislation that would keep families together and prevent a future occurrence.

Sincerely,



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CC:

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