



## News Release

Contact: Karen Seidman | Seidman Says Communications  
[karen@seidman-says.com](mailto:karen@seidman-says.com) | TEL: (202) 364-8134

### **Family Matters of Greater Washington Adds its Voice in Strong Opposition to Trump Administration's "Zero Tolerance" Immigration Policy**

#### ***Calls on Congress to Stand with Families, Stop Separating Children from Parents, and Work Quickly to Reunite Families***

Washington, DC (June 26, 2018) As one of the oldest, nationally accredited social service organizations in the Metro-Washington area serving families' needs and advocating for our communities' most vulnerable citizens, Family Matters of Greater Washington (FMGW) added its strong voice to the multitude of other concerned organizations to admonish President Trump's cruel policy of separating immigrant children from their families after they cross the border.

In a June 21 letter sent to its three local congressmen serving within the FMGW area — Reps. Anthony Brown (D-MD-4th); Jamie Raskin (D-MD-8th); and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) — FMGW's Interim-President and CEO Thomas L. Johnson urged the representatives to as "strongly as possible" "stand up for children and families by making it clear that children should not be routinely taken away from their parents at our borders."

Johnson explained that the Administration's current policy of "zero tolerance" has resulted in well more than 2,000 children being taken from their families in only six weeks, which is totally unacceptable. He pointed out, that in recent years, much work has been done nationally to ensure due diligence in keeping families intact. Just this year, Congress passed the Family First Prevention Services Act, a clear recognition of the importance in investing in family reunification and reducing congregate care placements for children — especially those of young ages. This national movement and legislative change came from years of education on understanding how destructive the trauma of separation is for both children and parents, and the poor psychological and developmental outcomes that result from young children being placed in congregate settings.

"Ripping families apart is immoral," Johnson wrote. "As professionals working in the foster care field, we know first-hand the lifelong trauma that children suffer when separated from their parents."

Extremely upset by this hurtful policy and the severe toll its taking on these families, Lisa A. Emmi, who serves as FMGW's program director of Child Welfare, underscored the importance to act immediately in showing its forceful opposition to the Trump Administration's actions and to seek a solace to remedy this harsh reality and reunite families.

"Every professional working with families knows that children need to be with their parents, and we know that this is true whether that child is a U.S. citizen, or an immigrant seeking refuge from a dangerous and hostile homeland," says Emmi. "Despite this knowledge, there are currently thousands of young children sleeping tent cities, strangers' homes, and indoor cages; removed from parents who have done nothing but try to keep them safe. The trauma we are needlessly creating for these children and families simply cannot be justified."

Emmi added these families deserve to be met with the compassion that which this country was founded on. “Using family separation as a deterrent, or a tool for negotiation, is an affront to the values of this country and everything we know to be true about family.”

Although President Trump has now issued an Executive Order temporarily halting ongoing family separations, FMGW believes this measure does not go far enough. “This order does not address the thousands of children already separated from their parents, nor does it lay out a concrete framework to guarantee this does not happen again.”

The letter urges the three Members of Congress to work diligently to make sure that every young child who has been separated from their family without cause is reunited with their parent immediately. And further called for additional services for these families who have been unnecessarily traumatized, including mental health treatment and legal services. The halting of this practice is only the first step to correcting this terrible wrong. The families who have already been separated and traumatized deserve and require our country’s support in initiating the process of healing.

Johnson ended the letter with a plea — imploring the representatives to do all that they can. “Please ensure that families remain together, that those who have already been separated are reunited swiftly, and that all refugee families approaching our borders receive the care and compassion that reflects the values of this nation. The time to act is now; the need is immediate.”

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### **About Family Matters of Greater Washington**

**Family Matters of Greater Washington** is one of the oldest, nationally accredited social service organizations in the Washington metropolitan area. Family Matters has been serving as the role of “family” to our community’s most vulnerable citizens. Our spectrum of programs, include: mental and behavioral services, youth development, independent living for teen mothers, home health care, and workforce development.

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