



To: Committee Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee
From: Ashley Devaughn, Youth Justice Policy Director
Re: SB 850, Correctional Services - Immigration Detention - Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act)
Date: February 26, 2020
Position: Support

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 850 Correctional Services - Immigration Detention - Prohibition (Dignity Not Detention Act). Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) SUPPORTS this bill.

There is widespread anxiety among immigrant communities about Immigrant and Customs Enforcement (ICE) actions. Immigration enforcement—and the threat of such actions—can negatively impact a child's long-term health and development. Children who reside in communities that partner with ICE experience negative educational outcomes and the detention of a child puts children at risk of emotional and economic instability.

2019 national data notes 69,550 migrant children were held in U.S. government custody over the past year, more children detained away from their parents than any other country, according to United Nations researchers. Being held in detention can be traumatic for children, putting them at risk of long-term physical and emotional damage. The study *Mental Health of Children Held at a United States Immigration Detention Center* by Sarah MacLean found that the physical and mental health toll that immigrant children experience during and after detention result in post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, weight loss, and sleep problems. The American Academy of Pediatrics report named *Detention of Immigrant Children* states that "There is no evidence indicating that any time in detention is safe for children" The position of the AAP is that children in the custody of their parents should never be detained, nor should they be separated from a parent, unless a competent family court makes that determination. The report goes on to indicate "Children deserve protection from additional traumatization in the United States and the identification and treatment of trauma that may have occurred in children's country of origin, during migration, or during immigration processing or detention in the United States." The conditions in which children are detained and the support services that are available to them are of great concern to pediatricians and other advocates for children.

A child's risk of having significant physical, emotional, developmental, and mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and severe psychological distress increases following detention. Doctors and service providers have reported anecdotally that they have seen more children exhibiting stress- and anxiety-related behavioral changes, including symptoms of "toxic-stress," due to fear that a family member will be deported. Children experience toxic stress when they are suddenly separated from their parents, which negatively impacts brain development. They are also at greater risk of developing chronic mental health conditions that include depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as physical conditions such as cancer, stroke, diabetes, and heart disease.

The experience of detention, even for a relatively brief period of time, has a detrimental effect on the mental and physical health of children. Immigration enforcement actions—and the ever-present threat of enforcement action—has traumatized for millions of children across the country.

We urge this committee to issue a favorable report on SB 901.

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Advocates for Children and Youth builds a strong Maryland by advancing policies and programs to ensure children of every race, ethnicity, and place of birth achieve their full potential.