



Opening Statement

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & LABOR

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The Hon. Robert C. "Bobby" Scott • Chairman

Opening Statement of Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

House Committee on Education and Labor Full Committee Markup

Growing Up in Fear: How the Trump Administration's Immigration Policies Are Harming Children

2175 Rayburn House Office Building

Wednesday, December 4, 2019 | 10:15am

Today's hearing will help us understand and address the impact of the Trump Administration's immigration policies on children -- particularly undocumented children and children from mixed-status families.

There are roughly 2.9 million children living in the United States today who were born outside the country. An additional 16.7 million children were born in the United States but have at least one parent who was not. Altogether, about 27 percent of all children in the United States, a total of 19.6 million, are growing up in immigrant families.

While immigration policy is a topic of intense debate, it is not the focus of this hearing nor is it within this Committee's jurisdiction. We are here today because we have a moral and legal responsibility to protect the children living within our nation's borders -- regardless of when or how they got here.

All children should have a safe and healthy childhood. Not only is this principle embedded in our moral code, it is reflected in our federal code as well. Federal laws protect the right of immigrant children and the children of immigrant parents to access many of the essential programs and services under the jurisdiction of our Committee.

Of particular interest, these rights include access to a public education for all students in this country.

In 1982, the Supreme Court's decision in *Plyler v. Doe* found that undocumented children are protected by the Equal Protection Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment. Accordingly, all children have the same right to a free public education - regardless of immigration status. Our Constitution prevents undocumented students from being denied public education services due to their immigration status.

Federal law also ensures that all children -- regardless of their immigration status or the status of their parents or guardians -- are eligible for Head Start, the largest federal early childhood education program, and programs that deliver basic nutrition assistance.

Protecting access to education and nutrition services for all children is critical to ensuring that the nearly 20 million children growing up in immigrant families in our country - regardless of status - have an opportunity to reach their full potential.

Regrettably, over the past three years, the Trump Administration has implemented draconian immigration policies and inflammatory rhetoric to discourage or prevent children growing up in immigrant families from accessing basic services for which they are eligible under federal law.

Since taking office the Administration has:

- Expanded deportation policies, including authorizing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, to arrest parents dropping off kids at school and conducting the largest workplace raid in history;
- Instituted a so-called “zero-tolerance policy” and separated more than 5,400 children from their families, many of whom were held in unsanitary conditions; and
- Finalized a new rule, which is currently being held up in the courts, that allows immigration officials to deny lawful permanent resident status to immigrants based on their use of vital services, including food assistance.

Throughout this period – and dating back to the 2016 campaign – President Trump has repeatedly and unapologetically directed harsh rhetoric aimed at immigrants, creating a culture of fear that has upended the lives of individuals living in immigrant communities all across the country.

The combined effect of the president’s policies and rhetoric is inflicting physical harm and emotional trauma on children throughout the country.

- The Office of Inspector General at the Department of Health and Human Services has documented distressing conditions in federal immigration detention centers. According to one of their reports, children who were separated from their parents “expressed acute grief that caused them to cry inconsolably;”
- In a recent study, early childhood providers reported alarming levels of anxiety symptoms and emotional distress among young children. One provider reported that one of her five-year-old children was so distressed that he was biting his fingertips to the point where they were bleeding.
- School administrators have also reported increased signs of anxiety and emotional distress among K-12 students as well as a rise in hostile climates, all of which undermine student learning; and,
- Providers of food, health, and early childhood education programs are reporting steep declines in participation among immigrant communities.

This Administration’s actions are jeopardizing access to a safe and healthy childhood for millions of children, undermining their development and altering the trajectory of their lives. We must recognize that denying any child access to basic services is not only immoral, it is harmful to our schools, our communities, and even our economy.

Frederick Douglass famously wrote that, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” As policymakers, we must protect the rights of immigrant children – regardless of their status – so that they learn, grow, and contribute to our nation. We must also increase federal investments in the vital education programs that support the development of all children, including the programs that help educators work with children suffering from trauma.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today, and I yield to the Ranking Member, Dr. Foxx, for the purpose of an opening statement.

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