

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/callousness-incompetence-u-s-mistreatment-of-migrant-children/>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

By Sandy Santana, Executive Director, Childrens Rights

It seems almost every day we learn something new about the horrible treatment of migrant children in the U.S. But this week brought a series of particularly heinous revelations.

More than 4,500 migrant children reported being victims of sexual assault while in U.S. custody, we learned during Tuesdays House Judiciary oversight hearing on the Trump Administrations barbaric zero tolerance policy. In some cases these children were abused by employees of HHS, the very adults supposed to protect them. The majority were unaccompanied minors, like the clients Childrens Rights has [represented](#).

How did our country get to this point, where the rights of children are largely an afterthought?

In a powerful exchange, Florida Congressman Ted Deutch [grilled](#) HHS officials about whether the agency had foreseen and prepared for the conditions that would lead to this widespread sexual abuse:

Over the past 3 years, there have been 154 staff-on-unaccompanied minor allegations of sexual assault. These documents tell us that there is a problem with adults, employees of HHS, sexually abusing children. When you carried out the zero tolerance policy did anyone worry about what was going to happen to these kids?

Based on these appalling [reports of sexual abuse](#), it seems the answer is no: our government did not worry about what was going to happen to these migrant children. Or at least, the officials in charge did not act to prevent it.

But along with callousness, negligence and incompetence are at play too, as Tuesdays hearing made abundantly clear. Carla Provost, U.S. Border Patrol Chief, openly admitted that the administration had [no comprehensive tracking system](#) in place when they began separating children from their families. We learned from Scott Lloyd, the former director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), that even though he was warned about the permanent harm that would be inflicted on children as a result of family separation, he failed to bring those concerns to his higher ups.

Meanwhile, family separations are ongoing. Last week, USA Today reported that border patrol agents are making the decision to [separate](#) children from their families without consulting a child welfare specialist. This flies in the face of best practices in the child welfare space, where state laws protect the sanctity of the family unit; children are only allowed to be removed from their parents care in extreme circumstances. Border patrol agents lack the professional qualifications to determine whether a child is at risk and should by no means be allowed to make such a life-shattering decision unilaterally.

And in New York, a [policy change](#) by the Trump administration has made it difficult if not impossible for immigrant youth fleeing violence in their home countries to seek legal protection under the 1990 Special Immigrant Juvenile (SIJ) program. Many of these children, including clients of Childrens Rights, escaped unimaginable hardships in the countries of their birth, making the dangerous journey to the U.S. unaccompanied by an adult. We should not deny them the right to seek protection and the chance to remain in the country legally.

These policies are being enacted in our name, on the backs of migrant children. Many of them are alone. They are depending solely on the government and its institutions to protect them. Regardless of political affiliations and personal beliefs, we should always make the safety and well-being of children our highest priority.

Thats why oversight hearings like the one on Tuesday are so critical. And its a good sign that House leaders have [issued subpoenas](#) to high-level officials like homeland security secretary Kirstjen Nielsen and others. We cannot undo trauma, but we can work to hold the government accountable.

If youd like to take direct action, call your [congressional representative](#) and demand that they prioritize the health and safety of migrant children. For updates, follow [Childrens Rights](#) on Twitter and sign up for [email updates](#). If this administration wont worry about whats going to happen to these kids, we as citizens have to take the mantle.

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First Name Last Name

Email Address

