

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/securing-equal-justice/supporting-immigrants>

Campaign and Advocacy

Imagine you are a child fleeing violence, or seeking to reunify with your relatives in the United States. You are crossing the border when the US government arrests you. Despite your age, you are treated like a criminal, locked in detention, and separated from your family. Not only must you endure conditions that the [federal government itself has found inhumane](#), but you must also [defend yourself in immigration court alone](#) because the United States does not recognize your right to a lawyer even if you cannot find one.

This is the reality that hundreds of thousands of adults and children face each day. It is the result of an immigration system designed to dehumanize and criminalize people, not welcome them with dignity.

Our nations immigration laws were created and founded explicitly in racism and xenophobia. The past three decades have been marked by an ever-expanding immigration detention system, and an immigration enforcement regime that criminalizes people of color and funnels people from the criminal legal systems into detention and deportation. As a result, our immigration system serves as a form of double punishment for people who pass from one legal system to another, compounding the racial disparities and injustices in both.

Just as Black people are more likely than white people to be targeted by police, Black immigrants are also disproportionately vulnerable to immigration enforcement. And since [one-in 10 Black people living in the United States are also immigrants](#), we've created an arrest-to-deportation pipeline that is ripping families apart and putting peoples lives in danger.

To end mass incarceration, we must end the detention of immigrants.

The federal governments own data shows that detention [does not deter migration](#), nor is it necessary to ensure that people [appear in court](#) both primary justifications used to defend the practice. All forms of electronic surveillance are equally without merit, as [people with legal representation appear at virtually every hearing](#) (99 percent of the time). Finally, ICE has failed time and again to accurately track and report its detention practices, [especially during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

For children, especially those who enter the country alone, detention is especially abhorrent. Unaccompanied children are often placed in [warehouse-like facilities](#) that inflict the same trauma as adult detention facilities. This trauma is compounded for non-English and non-Spanish speaking children, who are further isolated without culturally competent staff or language services to discuss their needs.

Every adult and child deserves to live freely in their communities while navigating the immigration system with an appointed lawyer. Veras work over the past two decades has given us a unique roadmap for how the government can end the detention of immigrants and replace it with a system that welcomes people with dignity, affords everyone the right to a lawyer, and keeps families and communities together.

With so many advances in how we care for children and protect their well-being, placing children in detention is a proven policy failure. Child welfare advocates have achieved important reforms that redirect government resources to quickly identify next of kin, ensure safe release, and provide ongoing support so familys needs are continuously met. The immigration system can, and must, do the same.

For adults, ending mandatory detention, shrinking ICEs budget, and making the closure of detention facilities permanent will help us end mass incarceration once and for all. And through our [Advancing Universal Representation initiative](#), we seek to establish universal representation, or the right to a public defender for all people facing detention and deportation, so adults and children will never have to navigate the immigration system alone.

Help Vera achieve freedom and dignity for all

Join our fight to end the detention of immigrants

Thank you
for signing
up!

Join us in the
fight for justice.

Help us spread
the world!

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

