

BAM'S WORDS RING HOLLOW AS CHILD DEPORTED

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Body

Talk is cheap.

President Obama once again proved the truth of those words during his visit last week to El Salvador, telling his host that he favors a U.S. immigration system that keeps families together.

"America is a nation of laws, and it is a nation of immigrants," the President said. "And so our job is to create secure borders, to make sure that we've got a legal immigration system that is effective and is not frustrating for families, doesn't divide families."

Ironically, that same day, the President was making another empty gesture to the immigrant community when it was reported that a 4-year-old U.S. citizen had been de facto deported to Guatemala, the country of her parents.

Her name is Emily Ruiz, and she was returning from a vacation to Guatemala with her legal immigrant grandfather. The U.S. Customs and Border Protection deported Emily and her grandfather after he was detained for an immigration infraction he committed in the 90s. The child's parents, both undocumented, live in Brentwood, L.I.

Emily's case inspired worldwide headlines and has caused much moral outrage and disbelief.

"I'm just shocked," said David Sperling, the Ruiz family's lawyer.

Yes, Emily's deportation is an outrage and further proof of the callousness and absurdity of our immigration system. The incident is also another example of the disparity between the President's words and what really happens in his government.

"The Obama administration's actions simply don't match the President's rhetoric. He is right that our immigration system should strive to keep families together, not tear them apart. Unfortunately, his administration has done exactly that," said Frank Sharry, executive director of America's Voice, a pro-immigration group.

Little Emily's case serves to strengthen the immigration community's disquieting suspicion of Obama. The child is living proof that such disparity between words and deeds is nothing more than a political game to keep immigrants and their supporters hoping against hope - and in the President's camp.

But despite the administration's assurances that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement focuses on the "worst of the worst," deportations continue at record-breaking pace, and the focus of programs such as Secure

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Communities and 287(g) have not been limited to convicted criminals. But more disturbing, ICE continues to arrest and attempt to **deport** young people eligible for the DREAM Act.

Fortunately, there is a rare piece of good news. Last Tuesday, state Sen. Bill Perkins (D-Manhattan) introduced the New York DREAM Act. The bill, co-sponsored by state Sen. Dan Squadron (D-Brooklyn), is similar to legislation being pushed in Maryland and California.

Perkins's legislation would give undocumented students access to financial aid, drivers' licenses, work permits and state-sponsored health insurance programs. Although it doesn't offer a path to citizenship, the bill seeks to prevent the **deportation** of Dreamers.

To qualify for these benefits, the bill requires the person to have arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16, be under 35, have resided in the state for at least two years, have obtained a high school diploma or GED equivalent from an American institution and have good moral character.

Hopefully, the New York DREAM Act will have a happy outcome. And hopefully, little Emily's ordeal will also have a happy ending. The family's lawyer is expected to return her to her country of birth - and her parents' loving arms - on Wednesday.

Let's keep our fingers crossed.

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