

## **4-Year-Old Girl Is Returned From Guatemala to Parents**

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**Byline:** By TIM STELLOH

### **Body**

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Updated 4:20 p.m. It has been a confusing three weeks for Emily Ruiz, the **4-year-old** United States citizen and Long Island native who was deported earlier this month to her **parents'** native country, **Guatemala**.

But on Wednesday morning she was reunited with her mother, father and little brother at Kennedy International Airport, after the family's lawyer, David M. Sperling, flew to **Guatemala** to retrieve her.

"Emily is back with us now," her father, Leonel Ruiz, said in a statement. "We have no words to express the joy it brings us to see, hold and kiss our daughter again."

Emily's troubles began on March 11, when she was detained at Dulles International Airport outside Washington, D.C., while **returning** to the United States with her grandfather after a five-month stay in **Guatemala**.

Because of an immigration infraction two decades ago, her grandfather was told he could not stay in the country. But Emily's **parents** are illegal immigrants, a fact that left her in limbo and complicated her **return** to the United States.

The case has been a touchstone for advocates of changed immigration laws; they say it speaks to broader problems facing children of illegal immigrants.

Mr. Sperling, who held a news conference at the International JFK Airport Hotel on Wednesday after the reunion, said the government's treatment of Emily was "disgraceful."

"It's incomprehensible that this happened to a U.S. citizen," he said, adding that Emily slept under a bench - and was left cold and hungry for many hours - while in the custody of Customs and Border Protection at Dulles.

Jeanne A. Butterfield, a former executive director of the American Immigration Lawyers Association who also spoke at the news conference, said there were 5.5 million children who have at least one undocumented **parent**. "I've never seen a little kid wrongfully deported," she said.

Customs and Border Protection issued a statement on Tuesday saying the Ruizes were told they could pick up the child, "but elected to have her **return** to **Guatemala** with her grandfather."

An agency spokeswoman declined to comment on Emily's treatment at Dulles.

Mr. Ruiz, who speaks little English, has said that he was never given the option to retrieve his daughter. An agent, in English, told him Emily would either enter the custody of the State of Virginia or **return** to **Guatemala**, he said.

Though Emily is in good spirits, the events of the last month have left her bewildered, said Hulda Mazariegos, a former client of Mr. Sperling's who traveled with him to **Guatemala**.

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On the plane ride back, she said, Emily was confused about which home she was flying to.

"She would say, 'I want to go to Guatemala,' " Ms. Mazariegos recalled. "Then she would say, 'No, wait, I want to go see my mom.'"

The family, however, did not attend the news conference and did not wish to speak with the news media, Mr. Sperling said. "We've tried to keep Emily out of the public spotlight," he said.

This is a more complete version of the story than the one that appeared in print.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

## Graphic

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PHOTO: A cellphone photo of Emily Ruiz, 4, who returned to the United States on Wednesday. (PHOTOGRAPH BY ULI SEIT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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