



# Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Write Here! Write Now! **July 2018**

(as of 7/2/2018)

**ISSUE: Stop Detaining Children and Families** - focus on the Senate

[www.uusj.org](http://www.uusj.org) click on Advocacy for Issue Action Information

contact: [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org) 703-786-5206 or 202-600-9132

**Time period: Send PDF/emails to [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org) by Monday, July 9, 2018 12:00pm ET**

## Instructions for Writing Your Letter

- **Focus on the topic** - #FamiliesBelongTogether has become a rallying cry against forcible family separation and President Trump's "zero-tolerance" immigration policy. Members of Congress need to hear that detaining families together is not a solution to family separation. -- See talking points, key message and sample letter on other side.
- **Be original and speak from the heart.** If possible describe a personal experience or story, or include 1-2 talking points (on page 2), **in your own words**, to support the main message.
- **Include a clear and specific action request.** "I urge you to..."
- Include your name and **complete mailing address** - proves that you are a constituent.
- **Send us your letters via email:** All letters must arrive by 12 noon on Monday, July 9. **PDF/scan and email** letters send to [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org) with the subject line: WHWN, name of your congregation and state.

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## Background & UU Grounding

**Background:** On June 20, President Trump signed an [executive order](#) that directed the Homeland Security Department to "maintain custody of alien families" while their cases move through the immigration system, "to the extent permitted by law and subject to the availability of appropriations." The Executive Order did NOT end the "zero-tolerance" policy or address how and when children will be reunited with their families.

In response to heated public anger about the Administration's "zero-tolerance" immigration policy and the forcible separation of children from their parents at the border, newly-proposed legislation narrowly focuses on extending family detention.

The Administration is seeking to revise the 1997 Flores agreement which set nationwide standards for the detention, release, and treatment of minors in custody of the U.S. government. The agreement outlines to whom unaccompanied children can be released as they await a resolution of their immigration case. If a release is not possible, then the government is required to hold a child in the "least restrictive setting appropriate to the minor's age and special needs." Federal courts have interpreted the agreement as limiting child detention to no more than 20 days.

**UU Grounding:** UUs have passed a Statement of Conscience, [Immigration as a Moral Issue](#) (2013) and two Actions of Immediate Witness, [End Immigrant Child and Family Detention Now](#) (2015), [End Family Separation and Detention of Asylum Seekers and Abolish ICE](#) (2018) that are directly relevant to this issue.

**(See other side for Talking Points, Key Messages and SAMPLE Letter)**

## Key Message, Facts and Talking Points

### Key Messages:

Reject proposals expand family detention and push the Administration to end its “zero-tolerance” immigration policy that separates children from their parents at the border and detains children away from their parents. Non-restrictive, community-based alternatives to detention are the most appropriate response for families, children, and asylum seekers.

### Facts and Talking Points:

- **The United States is better than this!** We have a long history of welcoming immigrants and asylum seekers and we must treat all people humanely, with dignity and respect.
- **Detaining families together is not an acceptable solution to family separation.** Non-restrictive, community-based alternatives to detention are the most appropriate response for families, children, and asylum seekers.
- **It’s unacceptable that over 2,300 children were separated from their families during a recent six-week period in April and May 2018.** This was as a result of the Attorney General’s announcement of a “zero-tolerance” policy in dealing with migrants who cross into the U.S. illegally.
- **No law requires children to be separated from their parents when caught crossing into the country illegally.** There was a time when ICE policy didn’t call for detaining all families.
- **Urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to hold immediate hearings on the administration’s treatment of children along the southern border.**

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### Sample Letter

(as much as possible, use your own words)

Today’s date

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_ [name of your Senator],

I am a Unitarian Universalist from [optional: name of congregation and location]. My faith believes in the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the Administrations “zero-tolerance” policy does not treat families with dignity and puts children at physical and emotional risk.

I’m upset with how our country is treating families seeking refuge and a better life. I urge you to reject any legislation that expands family detention or allows children to be detained indefinitely with their parents, or undermines protections for children in detention. There are better community-based alternatives to detention that are a more humane for families and asylum seekers.

*[you can include a personal experience, story, concern, or pick 1-2 talking points from above),  
in your own words, to support the main message.]*

Please speak out to protect asylum seekers, young children, and other vulnerable populations from being harmfully detained. Children especially should not be incarcerated or needlessly separated from a parent.

*[Insert personal wrap up sentence such as “Thank you for your consideration of my [concerns/story].  
I look forward to your response. etc.]*

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME and **COMPLETE ADDRESS**

(See other side for writing instructions and background)