

Valuing Our Families and Our Children: Child Citizen Protection Act (H.R. 182)

Every immigrant's story is a story about family. As the immigration debate heats up across the nation, one group of citizens has a unique stake in it: the American-born children of immigrants.



MYTHS vs. FACTS...

MYTH: “The immigration debate doesn’t affect me, because I am a U.S. citizen.”

FACT: Immigration affects all of us.

Immigration is not just about green cards, borders or someone else’s family. It affects all of us. Immigrants do not live in isolation. We share zip codes, jobs, schools, places of worship and families. Nearly 1 in 10 American families are of mixed immigration status: at least one parent is a non-citizen, and one child a citizen. An estimated 3.1 million US citizen children have at least one parent who is undocumented.

MYTH: “Our immigration system considers US citizen children before deporting an immigrant parent.”

FACT: Today’s immigration laws force parents to abandon their US citizen children.

In 1996, our immigration system made deportation a mandatory punishment for many non-citizens—including long-term and legal permanent residents. When punishment is mandatory judges do not have a say in deciding if deportation is fair, robbing immigrant families of a day in court and a chance to show how permanent exile from the U.S. would impact their family.

The result? Every year, nearly 200,000 non-citizens—many with kids who are U.S. citizens—are deported and torn away from their families *even when a judge thinks they deserve to stay in the U.S.* to help raise and support those families. Under mandatory deportation, the judge’s hands are tied. Families must choose between splitting up, resulting in more single parent households and psychological and financial hardship, or forcing their U.S. citizen children into deportation with them. These American children may have to start over in a country with a new language, fewer resources and an uncertain future. America’s immigration laws force American children to lose their parent, or their country.

Mandatory deportation is a life sentence of exile. Such a severe, "one size fits all" punishment cannot be the basis of our immigration system.

WHAT’S THE SOLUTION?

Congressman Jose Serrano (D-NY) introduced the Child Citizen Protection Act (H.R. 182), a limited bill to restore justice to our immigration system by allowing U.S. citizen children to be heard before a parent is taken away. The Child Citizen Protection Act would repeal the harshest provisions of the 1996 laws and allow immigration judges to consider whether deportation is "clearly against the best interests of a US citizen child". It preserves the basic notion of fairness that should define the U.S. justice system. It allows judges to judge, and families to have a day in court.

The Child Citizen Protection Act is an opportunity for our leaders to show that they truly value families, that the health, safety and well being of our nation’s children are a top priority.

Since the immigration laws changed in 1996, members of Congress from both parties, Immigration Judges, religious leaders, media and American children have criticized the cruel and unintended consequences of mandatory deportation on families.

Our Leaders	Our Children
<p>"Federal officials came to our house to arrest my mother while my father was at work. It was a frightening situation for my entire family that occurred through no fault of my mother, who had lived in America for more than 30 years. I believe that we can, and must, do our best to prevent situations like this from occurring in the future." —Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM)</p> <p>"[Non-citizens who] clearly rehabilitated themselves . . . are no longer a threat to society, and have started families. In these cases, deportation seems an extreme remedy." —Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL), an original supporter of the 1996 laws.</p> <p>"We grant due process rights to citizens and non-citizens alike; not out of some soft-hearted sentimentality, but because we believe that these rights form an important cornerstone to maintaining civilized society." —Representative John Conyers (D-MI)</p> <p>"While immigration is a complicated economic, political, and cultural issue, it is also a stark moral challenge for our nation. It is our view that immigration is a moral issue because it impacts the human dignity of the person." —Reverend Jaime Soto, Auxiliary Bishop of Orange, California</p> <p>"We advocate for just policies that respect human rights of immigrants and preserve the unity of the immigrant family, including due process . . ." —Statement from the Roman Catholic Bishops of the U.S.</p> <p>"We must stop hauling away parents in the middle of the night in front of their children and denying . . . the most basic constitutional rights that we in America believe everyone should have. That is exactly what the 1996 laws did." —Representative Bob Filner (D-CA)</p> <p>"How I wish parents, lawyers, judges would put so high a priority on determining a child's interests." —Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY)</p>	<p>"I never saw my dad. I felt sad and mad at the government that he got deported and never saw him again before he was killed in El Salvador. Something else could be done, because kids need their fathers. My mom is single, and she's gonna have to work two jobs. With her kids, it's hard for her because their father has been deported." —Junior, 13-year old U.S. citizen whose father was deported to El Salvador (Los Angeles, CA)</p> <p>"I wonder every day when will I have to leave my family to be sent to Cambodia. I find myself distancing from the ones I love and wondering why I even have a family, when someday I may have to leave them. I hope we'll have a day in court to show the immigration judge that our daughter, who is a U.S. citizen, deserves the best from the American justice system: to be with her family." —Many Uch, lawful permanent resident whose daughter is a U.S. citizen (Seattle, WA)</p> <p>"I haven't seen my daddy for a few years. I talk to him on the phone sometimes. I miss him a lot. He used to take me to McDonald's and church and play with me. Mommy works too much. I want Daddy back so we can be a family again." —9-year-old Natasha Corrica, whose father was detained for 3 years (Brooklyn, NY)</p> <p>"I love my father. I'm very sad they came and took my papi away in handcuffs and deported him to Mexico. My papi never got a parking ticket, he never gets drunk, he works everyday. I want to tell the judge how good he is, but they won't let me. I want Santa to give me back my father." —6-year-old Alejandra Barrios whose father was deported to Mexico (Chicago, IL)</p>

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Let's Bring Our Immigration Laws in Line with Common Sense and Family Values