

Trump administration deported up to 463 immigrant parents without their children

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As many as 463 immigrant parents may have been deported without being reunited with their children, according to filings made by the Trump administration in federal court on Monday. Previously, the government had admitted to only 12 parents being deported without their children.

The official status of the 463 parents remains uncertain. Federal lawyers stated in court Tuesday that they were reviewing these cases individually to determine whether these parents were deported or had “voluntarily” elected to leave without their children. Officially, about 130 of this group have agreed to be deported while leaving their children in the United States, either to stay with relatives or to exhaust their legal avenues to asylum.

The total number of parents and children separated under President Donald Trump’s infamous “zero tolerance” policy initiated in May has been constantly shifting in government accounts, with the total number of children being given as anywhere from between 2,000 and 3,000 over the last month. The uncertain and shifting figures demonstrates not only the government’s bureaucratic incompetence but a cruel indifference to the fate of families caught in Trump’s anti-immigrant dragnet.

The 463 are part of a larger group of 917 parents whom the government has deemed either “ineligible” or “not yet known to be eligible” to be reunited with their children. Other parents have been denied access to their children on the pretext of criminal records, communicable diseases or other issues, according to *USA Today*.

The Trump administration has reunited only 1,012 children with their parents since a federal judge ordered a halt to its cruel and vindictive policy of separating families of undocumented immigrants after being

detained. The federal government has declared only 1,637 of 2,551 separated migrant children to be “eligible” for reunification, and it is likely the government will fail to meet tomorrow’s court-imposed deadline to reunify all of these children with their parents.

The fact that hundreds of parents were deported without their children raises the terrible prospect that they may never see their children again, or at best only after a lengthy bureaucratic delay.

Immigration lawyers who spoke to the *New York Times* said that it was likely that many of the deported parents had signed forms without realizing that they were agreeing to their own deportation, or without understanding that they would be required to leave their children behind. “Our attorney volunteers working with detained separated parents are seeing lots of people who signed forms that they didn’t understand,” an El Paso, Texas, immigration attorney told the *Times*. “They thought the only way they would see their child again is by agreeing to deportation.”

Yesterday, the ACLU argued before US District Judge Dana Sabraw in favor of increasing the period of time from 48 hours to a week between when detained families are reunited and when they can be deported, in order to allow them more time to make the heartbreaking decision of whether to be deported as a family or to leave their children behind.

Audio recordings of two immigrant mothers in court released by CNN give a glimpse of the enormous mental anguish and duress with which workers are forced to navigate the byzantine immigration court system. The recordings were made during a “credible fear review,” in which a judge determines whether an applicant has standing to pursue asylum.

“Please do not remove me from this country,” one

mother, fleeing gang violence in her home country, can be heard saying in Spanish, audibly fighting back tears. “Do it for me or for my son. I have nothing else. I have no one else. I am a single mother.” She told the judge that she was distraught during her initial interview and did not understand many of the questions that were asked of her. “At that time I was feeling very desperate because I was separated from my son. My son remained back at the ice box, he was on the floor, and I didn’t know anything about my son at that time.”

The judge determined that the mother was not eligible for asylum and ordered her to be deported.

The presiding judge in both cases reported by CNN, whose courtroom is located in the Port Isabel Detention Center in Texas where many immigrant children are being sent to be reunited with their parents, has denied almost 80 percent of the asylum cases he hears. Just last month, Attorney General Jeff Sessions declared that domestic abuse and gang violence are not legitimate grounds for asylum.

The chaotic and disorganized reunification proceedings implemented by the Trump administration have created Kafkaesque situations for immigrants whose court cases are still ongoing. Denver newspaper *Westword* reported that many of the dozens of parents who have been transferred from Colorado to Port Isabel to meet their children have missed scheduled court dates back in Colorado. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, this legal Catch-22 has occurred in other parts of the country as well.

In spite of Trump’s June 20 executive order ending the practice of separating children from parents in detention, the number of children detained in Texas has actually increased since the end of June from 4,919 to 5,024, a figure which includes unaccompanied minors, according to Houston Public Media. A nonprofit has already received permission to build an additional detention center in Houston, and three other applications for private, for-profit prisons are currently pending.

The treatment meted out to child detainees in such facilities, staffed by fascistic and anti-immigrant fanatics, is nothing short of deplorable. Court documents from Virginia and Texas first reported by the Associated Press last month showed that children have been beaten, stripped down and drugged. Complaints filed in previous years under the Obama

administration revealed widespread physical abuse and even rape of detained immigrant children by ICE.

Bloomberg News reported yesterday that human rights lawyers have asked a federal judge to appoint a special monitor after compiling 225 firsthand accounts of abuse by immigrant children, arguing that the government has conducted a “full-scale assault” on court precedent limiting the detention and mistreatment of immigrant minors.

Adults in custody have fared little better. A report last month on a detention facility in Massachusetts included details reminiscent of Abu Ghraib, with guards encouraging detainees to fight for their amusement and literally treating others as dogs. Immigrants at another facility in the state launched a hunger strike last week to protest inhumane treatment.

In other news, a federal judge has ordered the release of Pablo Villavicencio, the Ecuadorian immigrant who was detained and arrested by military police while delivering pizza to an Army facility in Brooklyn. Immigration authorities initiated deportation proceedings against him when they discovered that he had been the subject of a deportation order in 2010.

Judge Paul Crotty excoriated assistant US Attorney Joseph Cordaro during the court proceedings. “Well, the powerful are doing what they want, and the poor are suffering what they must,” Crotty declared. “I mean, is there any concept of justice here or are we just doing this because we want to? Why do we want to enforce the order?”

While Villavicencio is no longer under threat of imminent deportation, he must still fight in court to gain legal status. Villavicencio is married to an American citizen, with whom he has two young daughters.



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