

# US immigration agents use children to inflict terror on migrant families

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Three recent incidents highlight the depravity of the US government's bipartisan war on immigrants.

In each of these incidents, immigration agents used children to terrorize families seeking asylum. Together, they represent the latest escalation in the Trump administration's policy, laid out in a 2018 notice of proposed rulemaking, of abusing immigrants, in violation of previous court rulings, to deter people fleeing war and violence from seeking asylum in the United States.

## **Immigration agents detain three US citizen children for 13 hours at O'Hare International Airport**

Three children, between the ages of nine and 13, who are all US citizens, were detained overnight on Thursday at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, Illinois in an apparent attempt to lure and arrest their undocumented mother.

The children, who were travelling from Mexico with the mother's adult niece, were detained upon landing at O'Hare. Despite having a valid visa, the niece was deemed inadmissible and put on a flight back to Mexico. A crowd of protesters immediately formed outside the airport to demand that the children be released.

It is extremely rare for visa holders to be deemed inadmissible and turned away at a port of entry because inadmissibility factors are usually dealt with in the process of obtaining the visa. Only 0.06 percent of prospective entrants are turned away in this manner, which occurs when an agent, at his or her discretion, determines there is reason to believe that the entrant has violated immigration laws in the past, or is a drug smuggler, prostitute, terrorist, spy, or a Nazi Party member who actively took part in the Holocaust.

In many cases when an agent does develop such a suspicion, the entrant is paroled into the country and given a hearing to prove their admissibility.

After turning away the children's cousin, Border Patrol agents contacted their mother and falsely told her that they could not release the three from the airport unless she personally came to retrieve them.

The mother, who has asked to be identified only as "Sylvia" out of fear of retribution, feared that the agents were setting a trap to arrest and deport her while her petition for residency is pending. According to her attorney, Mony Ruiz-Velasco, she is

applying for a U visa, which means she has already been the victim of a violent crime and assisted prosecutors as a witness.

After her attempts to send US-citizen relatives to retrieve her children were all rebuffed by the agents, Sylvia turned to the Mexican Embassy. "I was really scared but I reacted and thought, we have rights and I called the Mexican Consulate," she told the *Chicago Tribune*. "I thank God I made that decision."

Despite having a pending visa application, and the lack of any legal justification for holding the children, it took the intervention of the Mexican government and Democratic US Representative Jan Schakowsky to secure an agreement from CBP guaranteeing Sylvia's safety while she retrieved her children. Finally, after 13 hours of torment, the family was safely reunited.

In the wake of the emotional reunification, Schakowsky used her role in the negotiations to posture as a defender of immigrants. "I feel that it's a kind of kidnapping of children by our government, and I'm really fed up with what we are doing," she said, before boldly declaring "I'm going to try to go in and see why our government is acting this way."

This is entirely cynical. She has offered no opposition to her party's policy of supporting the Trump administration's war on immigrants, having voted to authorize \$4.9 billion of additional funding for the network of concentration camps that were built under Obama and are being filled by Trump.

## **Border Patrol agent uses 12-year-old in custody as leverage in attempt to coerce mother into sex acts**

In an April complaint obtained by the *Washington Post*, a Guatemalan woman charges that she suffered online sexual harassment, abuse, and coercion at the hands of a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agent working at the child detention center holding her twelve-year-old son in Clint, Texas. The woman, who came to the US to escape domestic violence, has asked not to be identified because she is undocumented and fears retribution.

She has worked in California for most of her son's life to save up money and decided to send for him when he turned twelve, the age boys become a target for gang recruitment. He was taken into custody by US Border Patrol agents shortly after crossing the border on April 18, and she was contacted by CBP.

Two days later, she received a strange phone call from the detention center. When she picked up the phone, her son's voice was on the other end, but he was only allowed to talk long enough to tell his mother hello. In a scene reminiscent of a hostage movie, the agent took the phone from the boy and began to negotiate terms. "You see, Señora, your son is okay," he said, before telling her to meet with him in a Facebook Video chat so that he could "keep her informed about her son's situation."

Despite the ominous implications, the woman said in an interview that "it felt like a relief to have someone on the inside who could tell me what was going on day and night." Such is the desperation of immigrants who find themselves caught up in the horrific system of American concentration camps.

She did as she was told, and entered the chat room to find the agent in his underwear, with the camera zoomed in on his crotch area. After a conversation that went on for a half an hour, in which the agent spoke about his personal life, his church attendance, and his failed romantic life, he began to ask her questions about her romantic and sexual preferences. When she said she was not interested in discussing such matters and only wanted to know that her son was safe, he began to masturbate and insisted that she watch.

Amid reports that thousands of children in immigrant detention facilities are being sexually abused, forced to drink out of toilets, sleeping on concrete floors in hypothermic conditions, and dying from lack of medical care, she found herself pressured to engage in sex acts with the captor responsible for her son's welfare in one of these dungeons.

"I was in shock. I couldn't believe it. I didn't know how to act," she said. "I thought: 'My God, what is going to happen with my child? Did this guy do anything to him?'"

After she left the conversation, he began to harass her with a flurry of messages over Facebook and text message. The agency has refused to say what, if any, action has been taken to discipline the agent, and is sticking to boilerplate talking points. "The vast majority of CBP employees are dedicated, honest, compassionate and fair professionals," spokesman Matthew F. Leas said in response to the *Post*. "This alleged conduct is not in line with our code of conduct and will not be tolerated."

### **Agents force three-year-old with heart condition to choose which parent will be deported**

Immigration agents forced a three-year-old child named Sofia to choose which of her parents would be deported, after a doctor intervened to prevent the entire family from being removed, due to the child's severe heart condition. The family, including two other children, fled Honduras earlier in the year after several members were brutally murdered by MS-13 gang members.

Arriving in April, they planned to live with relatives while their asylum claims were processed. However, due to the Migrant Protection Protocols, the family was ordered to be sent to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico—a city with an international

reputation for the kind of gang violence they were fleeing. The Migrant Protection Protocols, commonly known as the "Remain in Mexico" program, is a prominent feature of Trump's strategy to criminalize asylum by forcing asylum seekers to wait outside the US while their claims are processed. This is in direct violation of both international and US law.

With the assistance of the nonprofit Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Center in El Paso, the family was able to get their daughter seen by a Department of Homeland Security doctor, who learned from the girl's medical records that she had recently had a heart attack. The doctor informed the agent assigned to the case that it was critical not only to keep the girl in the country, but also to keep the family together.

As the *Washington Post* reported in June of last year, following an outcry from child health advocates, family separation has a devastating impact on the physical health of children: "Their heart rate goes up. Their body releases a flood of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline.

Those stress hormones can start killing off dendrites—the little branches in brain cells that transmit messages. In time, the stress can start killing off neurons and—especially in young children—wreaking dramatic and long-term damage, both psychologically and to the physical structure of the brain."

Under immense pressure from the doctor, a federal agent agreed to allow the children to stay, but insisted that at least one of the parents be deported. To the shock of all present, the agent forced the three-year-old, who surely could not comprehend what she was being asked to do, to choose which one.

As described to NPR by the mother and others who were present, the scene that followed was thoroughly gut-wrenching. "And the girl, because she is more attached to me, she said mom. But when they started to take [my husband] away, the girl started to cry. The officer said, 'You said [you want to go] with mom.'"

The other two children latched onto their father, sobbing, and tried to pull him back as agents literally dragged him away to a jail cell, with other agents trying to pry the children off.



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