

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 2, 2017

The Honorable John F. Kelly
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Kelly,

We write to urge the immediate release of four children and their mothers who are being detained at the Berks County Residential Center (BCRC) in Leesport, Pennsylvania. Specifically, **we request the immediate release** of:

- **Teresa** and her three-year-old son **Josué**
- **Lorena** and her four-year-old son **Carolos**
- **Marlene** and her seven-year-old son **Antonio**
- **Maribel** and her 16-year-old son **Michael**

Each of the above children has been granted Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) and has a pending application for legal permanent residency. Three out of the four have received their employment authorization cards (see attached). They are eligible for social security cards and await only the final step in the adjudication of their legal permanent residency. However, they remain detained with their mothers at Berks, where they have been held for nearly 600 days. Multiple requests to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to release these families have been denied, with no individualized determination as to why.

These mothers and children fled unspeakable violence in their home countries in the Northern Triangle of Central America. Michael was only 14 years old when he and his mother, Maribel, fled El Salvador because they received death threats from the MS-13 for defying gang recruitment. Michael and his mother only want Michael to be able to go to church and attend school without the fear of being murdered for refusing to join the gangs. They know they will face extraordinary challenges and, very likely, violence, if they return, as Michael has two friends who were murdered for refusing to join the gangs. Seven-year-old Antonio and his mother Marlene have been in detention for over 550 days. According to her lawyers, Marlene is a survivor of sexual harassment and assault from gang leaders, and fled El Salvador with Antonio following threats to harm her and kidnap her son.

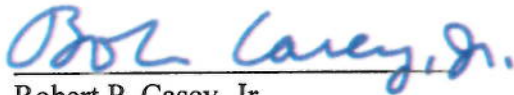
Each of these families has a story similar to Michael, Antonio, and their mothers. They fled one of the most dangerous areas in the world to seek refuge. During their time in detention, they were able to apply for, and receive, SIJS. Each of these children has received a predicate order from a family court judge that states that they “were abandoned, abused, or neglected by [their] father[s]...as such, [their] mother[s] are now the custodial parent, and responsible for all decisions regarding their court proceedings, custody and care.” It is imperative, therefore, that their mothers also be released and be issued Notices to Appear in order to continue their cases

before an immigration court. Three-year-old Josué cannot be expected to make his own legal decisions or enroll himself in school. For these children, already abandoned by their fathers, their mother is the only caretaker they have known.

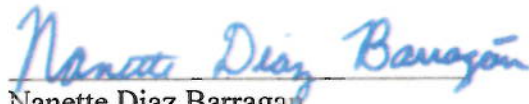
We also draw your attention to the remaining families detained for more than a year and a half at Berks. Although those children do not have the benefit of SIJS, they and their mothers have similarly compelling claims and fears of return. They fled brutal violence and death threats in their home countries only to be placed in detention and denied the right to fully state their asylum claims. In the interest of justice, these families, too, should be issued Notices to Appear before an immigration court and be given a full and fair opportunity to put forth their case for asylum.

With more pressing issues facing ICE and the need to spend our limited federal resources wisely, there are more cost effective and humane approaches to this situation than family detention. The Department of Homeland Security should be focused on apprehending and deporting violent felons and maintaining a secure border, rather than expelling young mothers and children fleeing near certain death in their home countries. We urge you, to release these families to their sponsors and allow them a fair hearing of their case. We appreciate your prompt attention in this matter and look forward to a prompt response.

Sincerely,



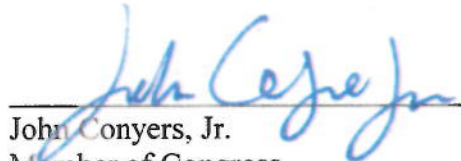
Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator



Nanette Diaz Barragan
Member of Congress



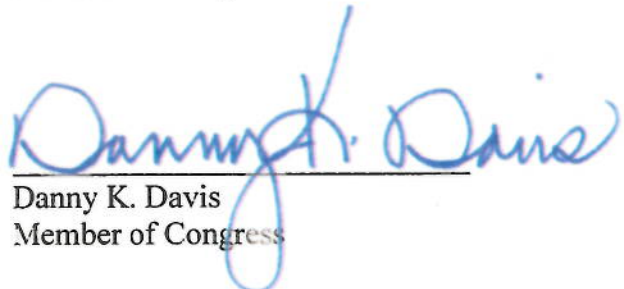
Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



John Conyers, Jr.
Member of Congress



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Danny K. Davis
Member of Congress



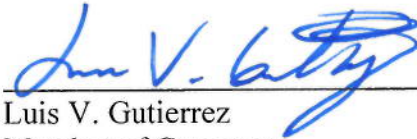
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



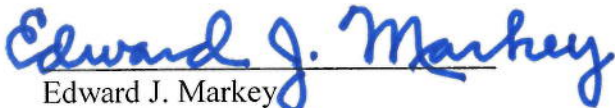
Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



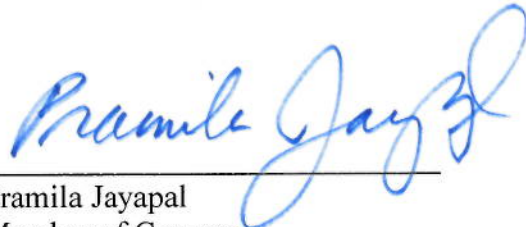
Mazie Hirono
United States Senator



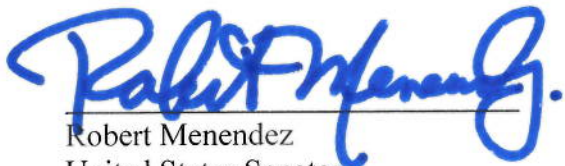
Luis V. Gutierrez
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



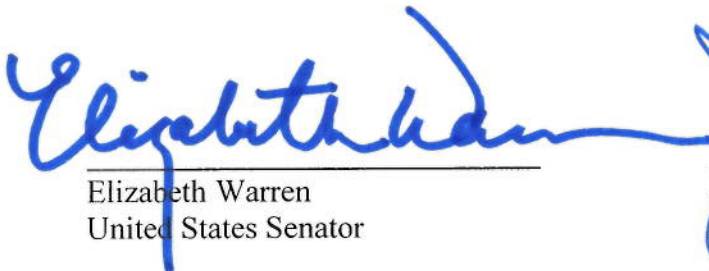
Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



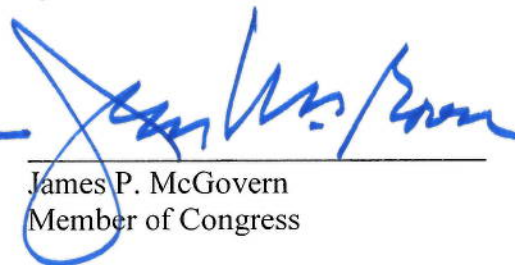
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



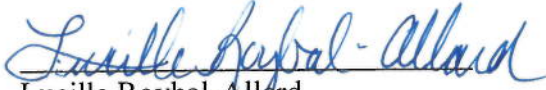
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Lucille Roybal-Allard
Member of Congress



Norma J. Torres
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress