

#THEBERKSKIDS ACTIVISM TOOLKIT

SPRING 2018

50"

40"

30"

20"

**DO NOT LET
KIDS GROW
UP IN JAIL**



AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



#THE
BERKS
KIDS

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THE BERKS KIDS

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THE ISSUE

LOCKING UP FAMILIES SEEKING SAFETY

**Article 14 of the
Universal Declaration
of Human Rights
guarantees the right
to seek asylum.**

**U.S. law guarantees
that people can ask
for asylum here.**

**Yet, every day
hundreds of families
are locked up in
detention centers.**

Their so-called “crime?”
Seeking safety for their
families as they flee
violence or persecution.

Every year, tens of thousands of
people come to the U.S. southern
border and ask for asylum.
Instead of getting refugee status
abroad, they come to the U.S.
directly and ask for protection.

The majority come from the
Northern Triangle countries of
Guatemala, Honduras, and El
Salvador in Central America.
But they also come from Africa,
South Asia, the Middle East, and
elsewhere – anywhere people are
fleeing armed conflict, horrific
violence, and persecution.

When people seeking asylum
– including children and their
parents – arrive at the U.S. border,
they are locked up. This isn’t new,
but the government is looking
to further expand immigration
detention and enact more policies
and bills to deter, punish, and
criminalize these families.

Locking these families up
undermines their access to asylum
and traumatizes people who have
already endured violence and
psychological harm in their flight
from human rights abuses.

It doesn’t have to be this way:
Successful community-based
alternatives to detention exist.

WHERE IT'S HAPPENING

**FAMILY DETENTION
AT BERKS AND
ELSEWHERE**

We're fighting to free all families in detention like #TheBerksKids.



The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) detains families seeking asylum at three family detention centers—holding as many as 3,000 kids and parents every day. Berks County Residential Center in Leesport, Pennsylvania is the oldest of these “baby jails.”

Amnesty campaigned for the releases of four of the families detained there, and in August 2017, all were freed. These kids and their moms had been jailed for nearly two years. One child was three-years-old when released. He learned to walk and talk behind bars.

Amnesty's [urgent action](#) to free these families was part of #TheBerksKids campaign to end the detention of families seeking asylum.

While the four Berks families are free, the battle doesn't end there. The government is trying to put them back in jail, and new families continue to be locked up every day at Berks as well as the detention sites in Karnes City and Dilley, Texas.

Family detention is inhumane, expensive, and undermines our country's long history as a beacon of hope for people seeking safety. Instead of being locked up, children and their parents should be treated humanely and able to access protection when they arrive at U.S. borders.

Amnesty International is fighting to ensure that people with asylum claims are given a fair hearing and humane treatment. We must do everything we can to ensure protection for people who are fleeing violence.

**“IN THE FACE OF
MASSIVE DISPLACEMENT
AND ARRIVALS, VERY OFTEN
THE FIRST REACTION OF
POLITICIANS IS TO RESORT
TO SCAREMONGERING....
A REAL RESPONSE CAN
ONLY BE BASED ON
SOLIDARITY AND HUMAN
RIGHTS...”**

FILIPPO GRANDI

UN HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT THIS?

Amnesty International is calling on groups across the U.S. to make their communities welcoming – to show that they and their neighbors welcome people seeking asylum. The President and your members of Congress need to hear from a multitude of voices and community influencers that locking up families simply for seeking safety is **not** the America we believe in. We need students like you to help build a wave of champions on your campuses who say **NO!** to locking up kids and their parents at Berks or anywhere in the U.S. for seeking safety.

1. LEARN ABOUT AND CONNECT WITH REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

To be an effective advocate and ally in this struggle for refugee justice, it's critical you take the time to educate yourself and hear from the communities affected by and working on these issues. Reach out to resettlement organizations in your area through WRAPSnet.org, and connect with local refugee and immigrant rights groups.

2. USE YOUR VOICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Spread the word about what's happening to #TheBerksKids and other families fleeing violence. Use social media to add your voice to the debate and tag others who you want to join you. See the **Social Media Guide** below.

3. CALL DHS

Text **BERKS** to **21333** and you'll be connected to DHS. Leave a message calling on the government to end the cruel practice of detaining children and parents for seeking safety.

Make sure to also sign this [online action!](#)

4. WRITE A POSTCARD

Send us personalized postcards calling on DHS to free #TheBerksKids and end the policy of detaining families. Email us to get copies, [print this one](#), or design your own! After you write one, share and collect postcards from your networks, and mail them all back to us at **Campaigns, Amnesty International USA, 600 Pennsylvania Ave SE, Suite #500, Washington, D.C. 20003** by June 1, 2018.

5. HOST A TABLING ACTION

Raise awareness in your schools and communities about the detention of families seeking asylum, so they can take action. Organize a tabling on #TheBerksKids in community gatherings such as your library, campus quad, or local farmers' market. Email us to let us know you're interested, and we'll send you information and materials on #TheBerksKids to distribute at your table.

6. SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Write a letter to the editor (LTE), or ask the board of your school or local newspaper to write an editorial, on #TheBerksKids. See **Tips for Letters to the Editor** below.

7. REACH OUT TO YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

Write a [letter](#) to your member of Congress explaining why you personally support refugees.

8. GET ON THE BUS (GOTB) AND RALLY

Join other activists on April 6 in New York City and [rally](#) to end the practice of detaining families seeking asylum, on this annual day of human rights education and activism. If you can't make it to New York City, organize a solidarity rally in your community.

9. MOTHERS & FATHERS DAY

Design and write a solidarity card to the parents detained at Berks. We're collecting cards for mothers until May 1, and for fathers up to June 1. Email us for guidelines and more information.

10. PASS A RESOLUTION OR GET A COMMUNITY OR SCHOOL LEADER TO SPEAK OUT

Pass a student or local resolution, or get a school figurehead or local leader to make a public statement saying NO! to locking up kids and parents for seeking safety.

- Whichever tactics you choose, amplify your action by live-tweeting, using FB Live, and capturing photos and videos.
- Tag @amnestyusa on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and use #TheBerksKids.
- Share with digital@aiusa.org what you're doing (who, what, when, where), and stories of why you and other activists are showing solidarity with detained families seeking asylum in the U.S.
- For questions; requests for Amnesty-branded materials like shirts, signs, etc.; or to let us know you're interested in taking action; email us at BerksOrganizing@aiusa.org



SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDE

Spread the word about what's happening to #TheBerksKids and other families fleeing violence. Use social media to add your voice to the debate, and tag others to join you.



ARTWORK

Contact BerksOrganizing@aiusa.org for digital files.

SOCIAL MEDIA SAMPLES

Facebook | Tumblr | Instagram

- Berks, a family detention center in Pennsylvania being used to jail children and families unfairly, is currently holding at least 60 parents & kids. Many of them are from Central America, where we've documented horrific violence. Tell @DHSgov to help #TheBerksKids <http://bit.ly/FreeTheBerksKids>
- @DHSgov whether for two weeks or two years, no family should be jailed for seeking safety. Help #TheBerksKids! <http://bit.ly/FreeTheBerksKids>
- Hey @DHSgov! No child should grow up in jail. It's time to free #TheBerksKids. <http://bit.ly/FreeTheBerksKids>

Twitter

- @DHSgov there are kids sitting in jail simply b/c they fled violence in their home country. Free #TheBerksKids <http://bit.ly/FreeTheBerksKids>
- @DHSgov whether for two weeks or two years, no family should be jailed for seeking safety. Help #TheBerksKids! <http://bit.ly/FreeTheBerksKids>
- Hey @DHSgov! No child should grow up in jail. It's time to free #TheBerksKids. <http://bit.ly/FreeTheBerksKids>

Planning to post your own? Have an action or event planned? Make sure to use **#TheBerksKids** and tag **@amnestyusa** so we can find you and say thanks!

TIPS FOR LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTE)

- Best chance of getting an LTE run is when it's in response to something that has been printed
- Keep VERY short; 150-200 words (papers have guidelines, so always check)
- Best to have one author
- Include name, city and state, contact info
- If you are writing in the capacity of an AIUSA member, identify yourself as such
- If the outlet is interested, they may write back asking to verify your identity and confirm that the letter is exclusive to their publication

LANGUAGE

- Children who have never committed a violent action or crime are being held at Berks County Residential Center, a family immigration detention center in Pennsylvania – some for as long as 700 days.
- These families have been forced to flee their homes because their lives are in danger. Many of them are from Central America, where Amnesty International has documented horrific violence.
- In August, four families were released after being held for nearly two years at Berks. Some of these children spent a significant amount of their lives essentially behind bars, one even learning to walk and talk in jail.
- Berks is currently holding at least 60 parents and kids.
- The Trump administration is heartlessly sending families back to danger without a fair hearing.
- The Administration knows how dangerous these places are and why people are fleeing, but continues to treat people seeking safety like criminals.
- If deported, many of these families will be facing incredibly dangerous situations, perhaps even death, upon their return.
- It's time for the U.S. government to end the cruel practice of family detention at centers like Berks once and for all. I call on the administration to immediately release these families and end the practice of family detention.





WHY LOCAL RESOLUTIONS FOR #THEBERKSKIDS?

Together we'll build this movement based on solidarity and human rights.

We are living in a global refugee crisis. Some of these refugees are people seeking asylum in the United States – including children with their parents. They are in search of protection, and they come to the U.S. to ask for asylum.

But as we read in the news every day, there's a rising wave of anti-refugee and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy in the U.S. in response to this very real human suffering. U.S. politicians are scapegoating people fleeing violence.

As with other refugees, they are demonizing Central American asylum seekers as violent, dangerous, and a threat.

The U.S. should treat people fleeing violence with compassion. Countries around the globe have agreed that people fleeing horrific violence and seeking asylum will be treated with compassion and respect while their claims are reviewed.

Instead, the U.S. is treating people like criminals, putting them in detention centers and deporting them before their cases can be heard in court.

***This is a crisis for those in need of safety
– and it's getting worse.***

The Administration and Congress are seeking to criminalize and punish more and more people – especially children and families – who seek humanitarian protection here. They are doing this even though U.S. law guarantees the right for people to come here and ask for asylum.

YOU CAN TAKE ACTION

Local Action, Countrywide Change

You can take action in your own community to change the course. Community groups and leaders (schools, businesses, faith groups, etc.) can pass #TheBerksKids resolutions to help change the narrative and protect the rights of asylum-seekers.

Passing a resolution will show that communities:

- Oppose the detention of asylum-seeking families at Berks and anywhere
- Want the U.S. government to change its policy
- Welcome asylum-seekers

We have the power to challenge and change the narrative – and the policy. But it starts with people on the ground going on the record to say **NO!** to scapegoating asylum-seekers, and coming together to build a wave of voices opposing cruel policies that target people seeking safety.



So Why Resolutions?

Experience shows that, when we collectively raise our voices, our national elected officials hear their communities. That's where you come in: help change the narrative by getting community leaders to speak out against rhetoric and policy targeting asylum-seekers. We need your help to put on the public record that a wide range of influential voices oppose locking up children and their parents simply for seeking safety.

A resolution on #TheBerksKids sends a strong signal to elected officials and community members that we will not stand for hatred and bigotry.

It may seem like a “small” thing to get a community group to make a statement in the face of hate and fear coming from national leaders about refugees and immigrants, but here's what resolutions achieve:

- They educate your community and elected leaders
- They get local press coverage (and Congress reads their local press!)
- They show resistance to anti-refugee and anti-immigrant sentiment

Elected officials that support anti-refugee and anti-immigrant policies do so because they believe their constituents feel the same. In the face of rising nationalism and xenophobia, we must show that communities do reject fear and hate, and welcome refugees and asylum-seekers.

GETTING STARTED

We're turning to you to get a wide swath of the public to come together and say that we, as a country, should not punish families for asking for asylum. We need to grow and lift up voices declaring we should not lock up families for seeking safety. This message is needed now more than ever. Resolution by resolution, we are building a wave of champions for protecting the rights of asylum-seekers. By passing a resolution on #TheBerksKids, you're helping change the narrative about asylum-seekers, and you're strengthening the fabric of human rights.

Don't hold back from thinking creatively on how to educate and engage others in your communities, and encourage them to take action!



- 1 Contact BerksOrganizing@aiusa.org with your interest in starting a #TheBerksKids resolution.
- 2 Check out the [Coalition Building 101](#) sheet, [Community Mapping](#) tool, [Organizing Chart](#), sample [Berks Organizing Chart](#), and the templates below for student and local resolutions.
- 3 Request meetings with community/school groups, leaders, and figureheads to inform them on what's going on. Share Amnesty materials, and urge them to take a public stance. Ramp up local awareness and keep the conversations going. We'll amplify these resolutions and statements with coalition partners so our elected officials understand there's a powerful grassroots movement to halt this cruel practice.

STUDENT RESOLUTION *TEMPLATE*

WHEREAS we are living through the greatest refugee crisis since World War II, affecting all regions of the world;

WHEREAS some of those refugees are families seeking asylum in the United States after fleeing horrific violence and persecution in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador;

WHEREAS the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) detains families seeking asylum at three detention centers in Pennsylvania and Texas, where more than 3,000 children, mothers, and fathers can be detained on any day;

WHEREAS one of these centers is Berks County Residential Center in Leesport, Pennsylvania;

WHEREAS U.S. courts have ordered that the U.S. government should release families within 20 days under the terms of the 1997 legal settlement, the Flores Agreement;

WHEREAS at the Berks County Residential Center, some families were detained for nearly two years for asking for asylum, including a three-year-old who spent half his life in detention, where he learned to walk and talk;

WHEREAS detention traumatizes children and their parents who have endured violence and psychological harm in their flight from human rights abuses;

WHEREAS U.S. law grants the right for individuals to seek asylum in the United States, and be protected from return to countries where they are at risk of serious human rights abuses;

WHEREAS family detention is inhumane and undermines our country's long bipartisan history as a beacon of hope and place of refuge for people seeking safety;

WHEREAS we all share a responsibility to help people who have lost everything, and to give them a chance to rebuild their lives safely, as any of us would want when seeking refuge;

WHEREAS the students of [SCHOOL] include individuals from all parts of the world who represent many cultures, celebrate diversity, and welcome all people;

WHEREAS over [XX] languages are spoken in our school and [XX] countries are represented;

WHEREAS these diverse students have enriched [SCHOOL] in sports, academics, sciences, and arts;

WHEREAS the [SCHOOL] community welcomes and benefits from students from around the world;

RESOLVED, the student body of [SCHOOL] welcomes refugees and opposes the practice of detaining families seeking asylum at Berks County Residential Center and elsewhere, and calls upon communities in Pennsylvania and other states to join it in supporting a stronger national effort to oppose the inhumane practice of detaining families seeking refuge in the United States.

LOCAL RESOLUTION *TEMPLATE*

WHEREAS we are living through the greatest refugee crisis since World War II, affecting all regions of the world;

WHEREAS some of those refugees are families seeking asylum in the United States after fleeing horrific violence and persecution in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador;

WHEREAS the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) detains families seeking asylum at three detention centers in Pennsylvania and Texas, where more than 3,000 children, mothers, and fathers can be detained on any day;

WHEREAS one of these centers is Berks County Residential Center in Leesport, Pennsylvania;

WHEREAS U.S. courts have ordered that the U.S. government should release families within 20 days under the terms of the 1997 legal settlement, the Flores Agreement;

WHEREAS at the Berks County Residential Center, some families were detained for nearly two years for asking for asylum, including a three-year-old who spent half his life in detention, where he learned to walk and talk;

WHEREAS detention traumatizes children and their parents who have endured violence and psychological harm in their flight from human rights abuses;

WHEREAS U.S. law grants the right for individuals to seek asylum in the United States, and be protected from return to countries where they are at risk of serious human rights abuses;

WHEREAS under international human rights law, the detention of asylum-seekers should be a last resort and where alternatives are available, asylum-seekers should not be detained;

WHEREAS under international human rights law, children should only be detained in exceptional circumstances and for the shortest possible time;

WHEREAS detention undermines a fair opportunity to seek asylum by blocking access to legal information and counsel;

WHEREAS family detention is inhumane and undermines our country's long bipartisan history as a beacon of hope and place of refuge for people seeking safety;

WHEREAS we all share a responsibility to help people who have lost everything, and to give them a chance to rebuild their lives safely, as any of us would want when seeking refuge;

RESOLVED, [COMMUNITY] welcomes refugees and opposes the practice of detaining families seeking asylum at Berks County Residential Center and elsewhere, and calls upon communities in Pennsylvania and other states to join it in supporting a stronger national effort to oppose the inhumane practice of detaining families seeking refuge in the United States.

TAKE ACTION



KEY DATES

MARCH 8
International
Women's Day

APRIL 6
Get On The
Bus (GOTB) in
New York

MAY 13
Mother's Day
in Honduras
& the US

JUNE 20
World Refugee
Day

MARCH 21
International Day
for the Elimination
of Racial
Discrimination

MAY 10
Mother's Day
in El Salvador
& Guatemala

JUNE 17
Father's Day
in Guatemala,
El Salvador &
the US

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To see our reports, videos, and blogs, check out our website: www.amnestyusa.org/theberkskids
For questions, or to let us know you're interested in taking action, email us at: BerksOrganizing@aiusa.org