



May 4, 2021

Dear Senator:

**Re: Co-sponsor Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act (S.1186) and Freedom for Families Act (S.1517)**

Amnesty International USA urges you to co-sponsor the recently introduced **Freedom for Families Act (S. 1517, H.R. 2925)**. As a bill focused on families and children, the bill is an important legislative companion to the **Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act (S. 1186, H.R. 2222)** which would transform the immigration detention system and prohibit the mass detention of immigrants and asylum seekers.

The Freedom for Families Act addresses the detention of families with children who come to the U.S. seeking safety and humanitarian protection. The United Nations [Special Rapporteur](#) on torture has noted that immigration detention of children puts them at risk of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment prohibited under international law. Pediatric experts have found serious [harm](#) to the mental and physical health of detained children, with even brief detention having the potential of causing psychological trauma and inducing long-term mental health risks.

The Biden Administration has made [some](#) strides in restricting long-term immigrant family detention with the release of families from facilities in Berks County (PA); Karnes City (TX) and Dilley (TX). The administration has also maintained [relatively low](#) levels of immigration detention overall.

**It is therefore imperative on Congress to act now to ensure that under this administration and any future administration, (1) immigrant family detention facilities are closed for good; (2) asylum seekers are not jailed; and (3) the overall detention system is transformed to conform with our international and domestic human rights obligations.**

The Freedom for Families Act will end the unconscionable practice of detaining families and children and ensure that families are not locked up while they pursue their asylum cases, with community-based support as needed. It will prohibit the use of federal funds to operate or construct family detention facilities by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) or its contractors. It will also support the development of humane, non-profit operated, community-based programs that can serve as alternatives to detention (“ATD”), consistent with international best practices, where needed to facilitate participation in immigration court proceedings. Such ATD programs not only have a proven [track record](#), they are [cost-effective](#) and can leverage the [considerable expertise and capacity](#) of existing community-based organizations across the country.

The Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act ends mandatory detention and restores due process by mandating individualized consideration of each person’s case. It prevents the detention of vulnerable individuals, and ends the use of private prisons and county jails over a three-year phase out period. The

bill sets standards for humane treatment including a ban on solitary confinement, and strengthens oversight, transparency, and accountability across the detention system.

Our international and domestic human rights obligations make clear: children should never be detained, and people seeking safety should not be detained. We urge Congress to swiftly pass **the Dignity for Detained Immigrants Act (S. 1186, H.R. 2222) and the Freedom for Families Act (S. 1517, H.R. 2925) and end the cruel, unjust, and abusive practice of detaining immigrant families, asylum seekers, and other vulnerable immigrants.**

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns at [jlin@aiusa.org](mailto:jlin@aiusa.org) or 202/281-0017.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Joanne Lin".

Joanne Lin  
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