Dear Honorable Senators and Representatives of Washington State,

We, the undersigned human rights, immigration, labor, faith, criminal justice, children’s rights, and civil liberties organizations, write to urge you to oppose increased deportation efforts and the opening of new immigrant family detention centers as responses to the current humanitarian situation involving unaccompanied minors traveling from Central America. Instead, make the funding and support of the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) a top priority.

We are alarmed by the growing humanitarian crisis along our nation’s southern border and the lack of effective action taken by President Obama and Congress. We are concerned by the proposal for new family detention centers. Family detention does not reflect American values of justice, equity, and humanitarianism. Locking families up, some with toddlers, is inhumane.

Recent experience with this policy option suggests that alternatives must be pursued. In 2009, lawsuits exposed poor living conditions in the T. Don Hutto Residential Center in Taylor, Texas, which forced the facility to stop holding families. Spending public resources on the placement of families in facilities that equate to jail is not financially, morally, or pragmatically sound public policy. Concurrently, the expansion of private prisons, such as the facility in Adelanto, California, is an unnecessary expense that increases detention capacity while doing nothing to provide long-term solutions.

Additionally, reflexively increasing and expediting deportation efforts will not solve the problem. Tens of thousands of young Central Americans have arrived at our nation’s doorstep for a reason. Simply sending them back to their home nations, which are plagued by violence and economic hardship, will not provide long-term benefits. Throwing more money at border security is
not the sort of long-sighted, innovative policy response that is needed at this time. Proper and timely handling of the immigration trials of young immigrants will allow for those that have a legal claim to enter the U.S. to stay.

President Obama has requested from Congress $3.7 billion to address needs related to the crisis along the U.S.-Mexico border. We should be focused on ensuring that the children and families now arriving at our borders are able to have full and fair hearings that will enable those who qualify for protection under our law to have access to that protection.

**Ensure that children have access to lawyers and a fair day in court.** Instead of fast-tracking the deportation of vulnerable children and denying them basic due process rights, we urge Congress to increase funding for immigration judges, ensure the appointment of legal counsel for every child facing removal, and expand legal orientation programs.

The President’s proposal does not go far enough. The Department of Justice Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) should be adequately funded to hire enough judges and staff to not only provide hearings for children without scheduling delays, but to reduce the existing backlog of approximately 350,000 immigration cases and to reduce the need for video hearings that can curtail children’s rights to properly present their cases. If 75 additional judge teams are necessary to ensure each child has an opportunity to appear before an immigration judge, which appears to be the case from the President’s supplemental request, then 75 teams should be requested instead of repurposing the 35 new teams already requested for fiscal year 2015.

**Oppose funding for the expansion of family detention.** The practice of holding families in detention centers is inhumane and opens the door for abuses and inappropriate conditions of confinement. Instead, the U.S. should allow families to stay together without the restrictions of detention.

**Commit sufficient resources to the Office of Refugee Resettlement to support both resettled refugees and children who are in U.S. custody.** The ORR serves both immigrants and refugees in their time of need. Congress must not allow the needs of unaccompanied minors to be pitted against the agency’s current refugee resettlement activities. The ORR must be appropriated sufficient funds in order to continue its vital refugee services while also attending to the current humanitarian situation driven by the growing caseload of unaccompanied children.

**Do not rollback protections under the Trafficking Victims Protection and Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA).** The supplemental request should not be used to diminish existing legal protections for these children. Provisions set forth in the bi-partisan TVPRA, which was unanimously approved in the Senate, must not be compromised. Hard-won, bi-partisan human rights protections must not be undermined in order to fast-track the deportation of vulnerable children.

The TVPRA requires that unaccompanied children from non-contiguous countries be placed in removal proceedings before an immigration court rather than subjected to an expedited screening and repatriation process. By contrast, the expedited process currently in place for Mexican children (who receive reduced TVPRA protections) requires them to attempt to make a claim for protection immediately to an immigration enforcement agent who is not impartial and without even the opportunity to consult with an attorney. This procedure should not be applied to children from non-contiguous countries and should be terminated.
altogether. All children should receive a full and fair hearing with legal representation and full protection under U.S. law to ensure their safety and wellbeing, and to preserve fundamental due process.

**Commit greater resources to address root causes forcing people to flee Central America and seek refuge in the United States.** The President’s $300 million request for funding to address the root causes of the recent influx of children and families seeking refuge is inadequate considering the complex needs in the region. The U.S. should model its response after recommendations by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who called for a comprehensive response aimed at preventing the need for such movement and displacement of children and women from their homes in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

We urge you to join us in pursuing justice and proper care for young unaccompanied minors and immigrant families. They deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

Agate Passage Friends
Agnus Dei Lutheran Church
American Immigration Lawyers Association Washington State Chapter
Asia Pacific Cultural Center
Asian Coalition for Equality
Asian Coalition for Equality - University of Washington, Seattle
Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of King County
Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of Pierce County
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
Bethany Lutheran Church, Bainbridge Is.
B-town Consulting
Casa Latina
Cascade Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Catholic Community Services, Tacoma
Centro Latino
Children’s Alliance
Chinese Information and Service Center
Church Council
Church Council of Greater Seattle
CIELO
Columbia City Church of Hope
Committee for Children
Community & Middle East Peace Builders
Community Cafe Leadership Team
Community to Community Development
Congregation Beth Shalom
Consejo Counseling & Referral Service
Crown Hill United Methodist Church
Diocese of Olympia
Eastshore Unitarian Church
Eastside Latinos
Evangelical Covenant Church
El Centro de la Raza
Ellensburg First United Methodist Church
Entre Hermanos
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches
Fairwood Community United Methodist Church
Faith Action Network
Fallon International
Fire Mountain Chapter Fellowship of Reconciliation
Gethsemane Lutheran Church
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church
Green Lake United Methodist Church
Hillel at the University of Washington
Iglesia El Amor de Cristo of the Wenatchee First United Methodist Church
Immanuel Lutheran Congregation
Indonesian Lutheran Fellowship
Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center
International Community Health Services
Jewish Family Service
Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle
Kitsap Immigrant Assistance Center
KolHanehshamah Temple Youth Group
KolHaNeshmah Synagogue
Latina/o Bar Association of Washington
Latino Community Fund of Washington State
Latino Education & Training Institute
Lauren Kurland
Law Office of Gabriel R Harrison
Legacy of Equality, Leadership & Organizing
Libertad Law Group PLLC
Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Mary Mahoney Prof. Nurses Organization
Mujeres NW
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum Seattle
National Council of Jewish Women
Northlake Unitarian Universalist Church
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
NW Family Services
OneAmerica
OPEIU #8
Org. of Chinese Americans - Greater Seattle
Para Los Ninos de Highline
Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle
Peace Lutheran Fellowship, Pt Ludlow, WA
Presbyterian Church, USA
Port Townsend Friends Meeting
Puget Sound Advocates for Retirement Action
Refugee & Immigrant Services Northwest
Refugee Foster Parent
Ronald UMC
Ronald United Methodist Church
SafeFutures Youth Center
Sea Mar CHC
Seattle Human Services Coalition
Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness
SEIU Healthcare 1199NW
SEIU Healthcare 775NW
Shalom Spiritual Resources
Sisters of Providence
Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace
Solid Ground
Somos Comunidad
Sravasti Abbey
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
St. John United Lutheran
St. Mark's Lutheran Church
St. Mary Church
Statewide Poverty Action Network
Tacoma Community House
TeamChild
Temple Beth Am
Temple Beth El
Temple Beth Hatfiloh
Temple Beth Or
The United Church of Christ
Transforming Conflict LLC
Trinity Episcopal Church
Trinity Lutheran Church
UFCW Local 21
Unitarian Universalist Voices for Justice
Unitarian Universalist Voices for Justice - Washington State
United Church of Christ
United Churches of Olympia
United Methodist Church
United Methodist Women
University Baptist Church
University Congregational UCC
University Temple United Methodist Church
University Unitarian Church, Seattle
Valley & Mountain Fellowship Social Action Team
Vashon United Methodist Church
WA Latinos Unite
Washington Coalition of Rabbis
Washington Defender Association's Immigration Project
Washington DREAM Act Coalition
Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Western Washington Fellowship of Reconciliation
Woodland Park Presbyterian Church Seattle
Woodland Park United Methodist Church