

The Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization

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Veterans Groups, Unions, and Civil Rights Organizations Say Raids Violate Disability Law

Over 250 Organizations Unite To Demand End to Raids Against Refugees with PTSD

NEW HAVEN, CT (January 13, 2016) – While President Obama remained silent about his administration’s ongoing immigration raids in last night’s State of the Union address, more than 250 organizations condemned them. In two letters to the federal government, veterans groups and a diverse coalition of organizations from across the country called for an immediate halt to raids against Central American refugee families. Many of the mothers and children targeted by the raids have trauma-related disabilities such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As a result, the organizations argue that the raids violate federal disability law.

Ten veterans’ service organizations and veterans legal service providers strongly opposed the government’s raids in a [letter](#) to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) sent Tuesday. They emphasized, “no one understands better than veterans the profound health impacts of exposure to trauma. We urge the Administration to immediately modify its immigration enforcement and removal operations to accommodate PTSD and other trauma-related disabilities suffered by these refugees.”

A [second letter](#) this week came from a broad coalition of disability rights organizations, labor unions, domestic violence organizations, faith-based organizations, and civil rights groups, including 158 who signed last week and an additional 83 who joined this week. As the letter explains, since 2014, thousands of mothers and children have come to the United States seeking refuge from gender-based violence and gang violence in Central America. Families have traveled hundreds of miles through dangerous conditions to bring their children to safety. Many have survived sexual assault or other forms of violence in their flight to rescue their children. As a result of this trauma, many of the refugees qualify as disabled under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The organizations demand reasonable accommodations and an immediate end to the raids, noting that, “the violent nature in which the current DHS raids are being conducted poses substantial risk for further harm and exacerbation of traumatic symptoms.”

“The broad spectrum of groups that have denounced the raids is a testament to how abhorrent the raids are, and how many people can empathize with the plight of these refugee families,” said **Swapna Reddy, a law student intern with the Worker & Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic at Yale Law School**. “The Central American refugees targeted by the raids

include indigent mothers and children, people with disabilities, and survivors of gender-based violence. The true state of the union is that Americans are appalled by these raids.”

"As a physician who cares for victims of torture and human rights concerns, I am deeply concerned about the health and well-being of Central American women and children subjected to these deportation raids," stated **Dr. Allen Keller, Associate Professor, NYU School of Medicine and Director of the Bellevue/NYU Program for Survivors of Torture.** "These women and children were traumatized both in their home countries and then here in the U.S.-detained at our border under inhumane conditions. As such, many of them are suffering from the effects of this trauma, including anxiety, PTSD and depression. They are an extremely vulnerable population and should be treated as such."

“The way these raids are being conducted violates federal disability statutes because the government has failed to provide reasonable accommodations for Central American adults and children with trauma-related disabilities such as PTSD,” said **Dorothy Tegeler, also a law student intern with the clinic at Yale Law School.** “That failure is also evident in the deplorable treatment of refugee families in the detention centers near the border and in the lack of accommodations for individuals unable to represent themselves in asylum proceedings.”

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