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**In the Face of Federal Lawsuit and Community and Political Mobilization,
Government Releases and Reunites Two Immigrant Families in Connecticut**

Yesterday afternoon federal officials in Connecticut released and reunited two families that they had forcibly separated and detained for weeks under the Trump Administration's illegal and immoral "zero tolerance policy."

Beginning in May, immigration officials wrested each child away from their parent through lies and deceit, held the children in cages, and then shipped them thousands of miles away from their parents, where they were kept virtually incommunicado. The government released the children and granted parole to their parents after the children sued in federal court. The children won a preliminary injunction requiring the government to address the trauma it caused; immigrants' rights groups and elected officials rallied around the decision and demanded more: release and reunification of the families.

On Monday, the government did just that.

These were the first cases in the country brought by children, rather than parents, to challenge the Trump Administration's forcible family separation policy. They are the first cases in which a federal court has held that the government's systematic dissolution of immigrant families violates the *children's* constitutional rights.

On July 13, 2018, U.S. District Court Judge Victor Bolden held that the government's conduct caused the children trauma, in violation of their due process rights, and ordered the government to act immediately to address the trauma it has caused the children. Three days later, the government transferred the parents from Texas to Connecticut, granted them parole, and reunited them with their respective children.

"The ruling by the federal court sent a clear message to the government: you cannot ignore the harm you are causing children by forcibly separating them from their parents. More detention is not a solution," said **Aseem Mehta**, a law student intern with the Worker and Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic at Yale Law School.

Plaintiff V.F.B., a 14-year-old girl who fled El Salvador, had last seen her mother in May. While V.F.B. and her mother were detained in an immigration facility in Texas, government officials led the girl away to shower, and when she returned, her mother was gone. Plaintiff J.S.R., a 9-

year-old boy who escaped persecution in Honduras, had not seen his father since June, when they were forcibly separated while the boy slept. Their lawsuit highlighted the constitutional rights of children—and not only the rights of adults—to family integrity, freedom from government-inflicted trauma, and legal remedies to address the trauma they have been forced to endure.

“This is a victory for two families and for an entire community in Connecticut that united behind these children and in support of our state’s basic values of freedom, fairness, and family,” said Connecticut Legal Services staff attorney **Massiel Zucco-Himmelstein**. “We look forward to a time when every immigrant child has the kind of support and advocacy that won freedom for JSR and VFB.”

The reunifications will help to bring these families’ nightmare to an end. While the trauma inflicted upon them by the government’s reprehensible practices continues, reunification of the children with their families was an essential first step toward their healing.

Immigrants’ rights advocates and elected officials who rallied in the children’s defense hailed their release and reunification.

“This is a tremendous win for the immigrant community,” said **Vanessa Suarez**, with the community organization Unidad Latina en Acción (ULA) and the Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance (CIRA). “We believe that every human being has the right to migrate, without being detained or separated from their families. Migration is natural and courses through the blood of all life on Earth. We will continue to fight for the freedom and reunification of all the families who have been affected by this administration’s ‘zero tolerance policy,’” Suarez said.

“President Trump's family separation policy is not only cruel and heartless, it's un-American,” **Governor Dannel Malloy** said. "It is clear that the children victimized by the administration's actions will carry scars from this traumatic experience for the rest of their lives. This decision is a step in the right direction to ensuring that the two kids housed in Connecticut receive the services they need and are reunited with their families. But this decision is hardly consolation for the child abuse inflicted by this president. We must as a state continue to stand up for the most vulnerable in our society, who have been repeatedly attacked by the Trump administration,” he said.

Senator Richard Blumenthal stated: “Justice and humanity prevailed in reuniting these two children, but this fight is far from over for these families and thousands more who have been cruelly ripped apart. These families have suffered unconscionable tragedy and trauma as a result of President Trump's disgraceful family separation policies. This Administration must be held accountable for the irreparable harm their shameful actions have caused. It is only through dogged determination by legal teams like Connecticut Legal Services and the Yale Worker and Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic and strong support from advocates, public officials and ordinary citizens who simply care that we will as a nation ensure the justice prevails for every person.”

U.S. Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro stated: “I welcome the decision to reunite J.S.R. and V.F.B. with their parents. This victory would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Connecticut Legal Services and the Yale Law School Worker and Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic—thank you for all of your work to reunite these families. Nevertheless, the scope of this problem remains tragically great. There are more than 2,500 children still enduring

the horror of government-sanctioned child abuse, and we must not stop fighting until each and every one is back with their family.”

Senator Chris Murphy noted: “What President Trump has been doing to these families is illegal and unconstitutional. The courts continue to say that, but he continues to do it. I’m glad that these kids are being reunited with their parents, but the emotional damage caused by this separation will never heal. There is an evil to what’s happening here. I don’t know why anybody would want to terrorize these kids in the way that his administration has, and it’s unfortunate that we have had to go to court over and over again to try to do the right thing for these children.”

More information about the cases can be found at <http://ctlegal.org/freeourkids/>.

Connecticut Legal Services is Connecticut’s largest nonprofit law firm, dedicated to improving the lives of low-income people by providing access to justice. CLS’ free legal assistance and advocacy help vulnerable people meet their basic needs and escape poverty. CLS is the lawyer for immigrant children who are detained without their parents at Connecticut’s federally-contracted children’s shelter.

The Worker and Immigrant Rights Advocacy Clinic, a part of the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization at Yale School, represents immigrants, low-wage workers, and their organizations in labor, immigration, civil rights, and other matters.

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