



For Release

U.S. Government Has Traumatized Migrant Children and Families Says Leading Mental Health Association

New York, NY – February 28, 2019 – According to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHS), more than 4,500 complaints alleging sexual abuse of unaccompanied minors in custody of the Office of Refugee and Resettlement (ORR) has occurred between 2014 and 2018 with an additional 1,300 complaints filed with the Department of Justice during this same period.

“The current administration’s “no tolerance” policy that resulted in thousands of children being separated from parents and families not only created severe trauma for these children, but has made them more vulnerable to assault and abuse, often perpetrated by contractual care staff at these detention centers causing further emotional suffering,” said Lee Jaffe, president of the American Psychoanalytic Association.

The long term impact of trauma created by these detentions cannot be denied nor minimized. Immediate reunification with families must continue and be facilitated by the ORR and the Office of Homeland Security and all allegations of sexual assault must be investigated. Perpetrators should be identified, removed from the facilities and dealt with by appropriate legal authorities.

Although reunification and protection is the goal, we know based on research as well as clinical experience, that trauma caused from separations and from sexual abuse will not heal simply with time and reunification. The long term impact of trauma will affect interpersonal functioning, learning, and will increase the risk of developing severe mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Untreated, these disorders can lead to life-long battles with substance abuse, suicidality, and physical health issues such as heart disease.

“Our government contributed to this trauma, and is therefore responsible for providing appropriate help and clinical support. Anything less continues the inhumane treatment of these innocent children,” said Jaffe.

The American Psychoanalytic Association is the oldest and largest professional organization for psychoanalysts in North America, representing 3,000 members, 32 approved training institutes, and 38 affiliate societies throughout the United State. The Association is comprised of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, educators, researchers and students who have an interest in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic therapy. Visit apsa.org for more information.

Media Contact:

Wylie Tene
American Psychoanalytic Association
Director of Public Affairs
212-752-0450 ext. 29
wtene@apsa.org