

## News Release



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## **Letter to Secretary Johnson from 136 House Democrats Says DHS “Has Not Fully Grasped the Serious Harm Being Inflicted Upon Mothers and Children”**

**“We believe the only solution to this problem is to  
end the use of family detention”**

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today, the overwhelming majority of Democrats in the House -- including Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Democratic Whip Steny Hoyer (D-MD) – sent Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson a letter ([link](#), pdf) saying the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) “has not fully grasped the serious harm being inflicted upon mothers and children” who are being held in “jail-like” secure facilities awaiting adjudication of their asylum and immigration cases.

The letter ([link](#), pdf), spearheaded by Reps. Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) and Luis Gutiérrez (D-IL), says the practice is “detrimental to mothers and children and is not reflective of our nation’s values.”

The letter calls particular attention to reports of poor or non-existent medical care for detainees, including those traumatized in their countries of origin and traumatized *en route* to the United States.

“We cannot hear reports of serious harm to children in custody and do nothing about it,” the letter states. “Detaining mothers and children in jail-like settings is not the answer. We have an opportunity to do the right thing and are confident that DHS has the capacity to honor our Nation’s longstanding commitment both to the protection and well-being of refugee families and to law enforcement and public safety.”

DHS dramatically ramped up the practice of detaining mothers and children in family detention centers a year ago in response to a surge of Central Americans seeking asylum from endemic violence, murder and rape. DHS claims the practice is necessary as a deterrent to other migrants and recently announced a series of measures to make conditions more humane. However, as the letter notes, a federal court has specifically disallowed the practice of detaining mothers and children as a form of deterrence and the Members of Congress who have signed the letter feel that the only humane way to detain mothers and children is to not do it.

“We believe the only solution to this problem is to end the use of family detention,” the letter states. “Children require special protections and should not be placed in jail-like settings.”

Last week, Reps. Roybal-Allard, Lofgren and Gutiérrez were joined by many House Democrats at a Capitol Hill [press conference](#) calling for an [end to family detention](#). There have been many recent reports of [lengthy detention](#), [serious medical](#) concerns and significant [developmental delays](#) in children. Opposition to family detention appears to be growing with the [U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#) and several newspapers (e.g., [New York Times](#), [Seattle Times](#)) highlighting the need to end to the practice.

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