THE CENTER ON IMMIGRATION AND CHILD WELFARE INITIATIVE

# The Trump Administration's First 100 Days of Immigration Policy: Impacts to Immigrant Children and Families

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## Executive Summary

On January 20, 2025, President Trump was inaugurated for a second term as President of the United States. On his first day in office, he signed 10 Executive Orders related to immigration, introducing dozens of immediate policy changes that profoundly affected individuals and communities across the United States and around the world.[1] These Executive Orders prioritized mass deportations by expanding immigration enforcement efforts, coordinating with state and local law enforcement to amplify immigration enforcement, and removing protections for migrants arriving to the US border.[2] While each of these changes threatens the health and wellbeing of immigrants broadly, the children of immigrants and their families are uniquely vulnerable to the chaotic policy landscape that unraveled across the first 100 days of President Trump's administration. Policies enacted by this administration are contributing to a pronounced "chilling effect," a phenomenon in which immigrants, including those with lawful status, avoid accessing public services or engaging in civic life due to fears of surveillance, detention, or deportation.[2] Restrictive immigration measures deter immigrant families from seeking healthcare, education, and social services, even when they are legally eligible, due to perceived risks.[3] This chilling effect undermines public health and social integration by fostering widespread fear and mistrust within immigrant communities.

This policy brief analyzes the actions taken by President Trump in the first 100 days of his administration (between January 20th and April 29th, 2025) that are poised to impact the lives of immigrant children and their families and offers solutions to address growing threats to the health and wellbeing of children of immigrants and their families. The policy analysis is organized by six major themes, beginning with actions that impact the lives of immigrants outside the US, including asylum seekers and refugees. The brief then examines both interior and border enforcement policies, including mass deportation, family detention, and family separation; restrictions to legal pathways; and policies impacting unaccompanied minors. The brief concludes with an analysis of implications for the social work field and a series of solutions that promote the wellbeing and inherent dignity of immigrants in the U.S., with special focus on the children of immigrants and their families. This brief is intended to serve as a guide for policy makers, advocates, and professionals who work with children of immigrants and their families, and who are invested in promoting communities that welcome and recognize the dignity and worth of all people.



## Asylum Seekers & Refugee Resettlement

Several executive orders enacted in January 2025 took aim at restricting immigrants from entering the U.S. Executive Order 14163, "Realigning the United States Refugee Program," enacted an immediate pause on refugee arrivals to the U.S. for 90 days, with exceptions for certain refugees on a case-by-case basis.[4] It is based on an argument that refugee admissions do not align with U.S. interests, and that states and localities in the U.S. lack resources to resettle refugees. This policy stands in stark contrast with the unprecedented numbers of people who are currently displaced throughout the world and also conflicts with the U.S. 1980 Refugee Act. As a result, thousands of people around the globe remain in refugee camps, often in deplorable conditions, when they had had hopes of being resettled to the USA in 2025 (or after). Refugee resettlement agencies have experienced significant funding cuts, leading to thousands of direct care providers and other staff across the nation being laid off.

Executive Order 14160 resurrected the Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP), commonly referred to as the "Remain in Mexico" policy, where migrants seeking asylum are forced to remain in Mexico while they wait for an asylum appointment.[5] This reinstatement forces families to remain in unstable and unsafe environments during lengthy legal processes, despite courts having previously ruled that the policy exposed children to life-threatening harm and lacked sufficient due process protections.[6]

Executive Order 14159, entitled "Protecting the American People Against Invasion",[7] disqualified individuals from applying for asylum if they did not enter the United States through designated ports of entry—contradicting long-standing protections under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA § 208),[8] which explicitly allows for asylum claims regardless of entry method. For many families with young children, crossing through irregular points of entry is not a choice but a survival strategy when ports are closed, appointments are unavailable, or waiting in dangerous conditions becomes impossible.[9] This executive order revoked a suite of prior executive orders (EO 13993, 14010–12), eliminating federal funding for legal orientation and pro bono services for asylum seekers, expanded expedited removal, established state-level Homeland Security Task Forces to support rapid deportations, conditioned federal grants on cooperation with removal objectives, authorized sanctions on uncooperative countries, and further barred unauthorized migrants from accessing public benefits.

The termination of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's CBP One mobile application, which previously allowed asylum-seeking families to request legal appointments at ports of entry, further restricted humanitarian access. Its cancellation left thousands of children and parents stranded in northern Mexico, where many face extortion, kidnapping, trafficking, and sexual violence while waiting for an opportunity to request protection. These families are now procedurally barred from asylum due to their method of entry—a technical disqualification that disregards their vulnerability and trauma.[10]

## Interior Enforcement

A variety of Executive Orders in President Trump's first 100 days focused on expanding deportation efforts inside the U.S. This included orders that broadened the population of immigrants targeted for deportation, expanded expedited removal, and pressured other countries to accept immigrants deported from the U.S. A directive signed in January 2025 eliminated "sensitive location" guidance, allowing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to conduct enforcement operations in sensitive locations previously prohibited, such as schools and hospitals. Executive Order 14159, "Protecting the American People from Invasion" expanded expedited removal, which allows for fast-track deportations for individuals who are unable to prove they have been in the country for more than two years.[7] Finally, the Trump Administration has used diplomatic maneuvers to pressure countries to accept deportees from the U.S. In addition to these efforts, the Trump administration has used an 18th century law, The Alien Enemies Act of 1798, to further increase deportations in the U.S.

The military has, for the first time, supplied cargo planes for deportation flights, detaining certain migrants apprehended within the United States at

the naval facility located at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Government officials have enlisted the cooperation of other nations as partners, deporting migrants from Asia and Africa to Panama and Costa Rica, while invoking the Alien Enemies Act to facilitate the deportation of Venezuelan nationals to El Salvador under an agreement with the Salvadoran government, which is projected to incur costs of approximately $15 million. Around 300 individuals comprising Venezuelans and Salvadorans have been deported and subsequently transferred by Salvadoran authorities to the country's Terrorism Confinement Center (CECOT) prison as of April.[11] In March, Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Salvadoran man under judicial protection since 2019 was mistakenly deported to El Salvador under the Alien Enemies Act. The 4th Circuit and the Supreme Court then ordered his return to the U.S., acknowledging the government's move as an "administrative error."

As a result of these mass deportation policies, preliminary data indicates a significant increase in deportations during the first quarter of 2025. These policies have rendered hundreds of thousands of adults and children "undocumented" and subject to detention, deportation, and family separation which undermines a child's sense of safety and attachment security.[12] The chilling effect associated with high levels of immigration enforcement threat may result in children missing school and other essential community activities such as religious attendance, educational enrichment, and civic engagement.[13, 14]

Moreover, the impact of these policies on children is both immediate and long-term, disrupting their sense of safety, belonging, identity and cohesion.[15] Children who experience the detention or deportation of a parent often experience intense trauma,[16] which may manifest as anxiety, depression, and behavioral changes. Research shows that even the ongoing threat of immigration enforcement can severely impact children's emotional well-being, disrupting their sense of stability, leading to anxiety, school avoidance, and difficulty concentrating. Parents under stress also struggle in many areas, including maintaining routines and providing reassurance, compounding the strain on family dynamics.[17] As enforcement intensifies, fear and mistrust spread across schools, clinics, and places of worship, weakening the community fabric and safety that children rely on to thrive.

## Family Detention & Separation

The first 100 days of immigration policy also rapidly escalated forced family separation and detention policies, deepening harm to immigrant children and families and reactivating past traumatic memories from previous enforcement threats and experiences. Executive Order 14159, "Protecting the American People Against Invasion", expanded family detention and incentivized states to cooperate with immigration enforcement, leading to an increase in the incarceration of entire family units.[7]

The Laken Riley Act has further eroded due process protections by mandating the detention of certain immigrants without judicial review, a clear violation of the social work profession's core value of social justice. This act allows ICE to detain immigrants without providing them the opportunity to ask for release in immigration court while their case is pending. A person does not have to be convicted of any crimes to be forced into mandatory detention. The act grants states broad authority to sue the federal government over immigration decisions with which they disagree.[18] This Act poses significant risks for mixed-status families, including the threat of deportations and potentially life-changing trauma for their young children.



## U.S./Mexico Border Enforcement

President Trump has prioritized political and economic interests over humanitarian considerations of immigrants at the U.S.-Mexico

border by employing a battery of executive orders that prioritize deterrence and enforcement over protection and due process. His executive orders, including "Declaring a National Security at the Southern Border"[19] and "Securing our Borders,"[20] threaten the safety and wellbeing of children and families. By limiting access to legal migration channels, including applications for asylum and refugee resettlement, the administration's approach increases reliance on irregular and dangerous migration routes. As a result, migrant children and families face heightened exposure to exploitation and harm through human smuggling networks.[21]

The focus on border security and enforcement fails to address key drivers of migration such as violence, poverty, and lack of opportunity in migrants' countries of origin, as well as the ongoing demand for migrant labor in the U.S.[22] This disconnect between immigration policy and the realities of migrant and economic needs not only sustains migration pressures but also inadvertently incentivizes long-term or permanent settlement in the U.S. Faced with the high costs, risks, and dangers of repeated border crossings under increasingly strict enforcement, many migrants choose to remain in the U.S. once they arrive, rather than risk separation from family or attempt circular migration. As a result, current policy deepens the fragmentation of families and undermines more flexible, humane migration patterns.[23, 24]



## Restrictions to legal pathways

The Trump administration has implemented several policy changes that curtail immigrants' access to obtain and/or maintain legal status in the U.S. For example, in early 2025, the Department of Homeland Security announced the revocation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Humanitarian Parole for those from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Afghanistan through Executive Orders 14165 and 14159. These orders effectively rescinded humanitarian protections for approximately 350,000 Venezuelans and more than 500,000 migrants from Haiti, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Afghanistan who were granted humanitarian protection after fleeing civil, political, and economic crises in their countries.[25, 26]

Executive Order 14160, titled "Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship",[5] aimed to reinterpret the Citizenship Clause of the 14th Amendment by denying automatic "birthright" U.S. citizenship to certain children born on American soil. Specifically, it targeted children born to mothers who were either unlawfully present in the U.S. or legally present on a temporary basis (such as on student or tourist visas), provided the father was neither a U.S. citizen nor a lawful permanent resident. The order instructed federal agencies, including the Departments of State and Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration, not to issue documents recognizing citizenship for individuals born under these circumstances.

The denial of citizenship may restrict access to public education and healthcare services, as eligibility for these services often depends on legal status.[27] While children of undocumented parents surpass the success of their parents, they face slower upward mobility compared to their counterparts whose parents have legal status in the U.S.[28] Deeming children born in the U.S. to undocumented parents stateless would limit their potential and exacerbate inequality. Moreover, an end to birthright citizenship raises significant concerns about the potential creation of a stateless population. Children who are denied citizenship may experience a diminished sense of belonging and identity, which can adversely affect their mental and emotional well-being. The uncertainty surrounding their legal status can lead to feelings of insecurity and marginalization, hindering their social integration and development. Stateless individuals often live in fear of abuse, arrest,

detention, and even expulsion from the country they call home.[29]

The executive order was promptly challenged in court. Various lawsuits were filed in federal courts, including lawsuits filed in California, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maryland, and Washington.[30] On January 23, 2025, a federal Judge in Washington issued a nationwide temporary restraining order, enjoining the enforcement of significant parts of the executive order. He described the order as "blatantly unconstitutional," referencing the Supreme Court's 1898 decision in United States v. Wong Kim Ark, which affirmed that children born in the U.S. to foreign nationals are citizens under the 14th Amendment.

## Unaccompanied Minors

Immigration policy changes by the Trump administration have also eroded protections for unaccompanied immigrant children. Unaccompanied immigrant children (UC) are minors under age 18 who enter a country without lawful immigration status and without a parent or legal guardian available to provide care and custody. On January 27, 2025, ICE issued its “Unaccompanied Alien Children Joint Initiative Field Implementation” memo, which mandated agents to locate UC, sort them into “flight risk,” “public safety,” and “border security” priority groups, and escalate removal or even criminal enforcement.[31] By February 14, 2025, ICE field offices were ordered to dedicate personnel to the initiative and ICE officers were granted access to the Office of Refugee Resettlement database, allowing them to view sensitive information about children, their sponsors, and other household members, along with increasing the vetting of sponsors.[32] The administration also greatly reduced federal contracts for shelter and legal-orientation providers for UC, forcing key nonprofits to lay off hundreds of essential staff, drastically reducing their capacity to provide legal assistance, medical care, housing and case management support.[33] These reductions have led to a 500% increase in length of time UC remain in residential care, from an average of 30 days to 217 days. Further, these cuts have resulted in a two-third reduction in the number of UC receiving residential support over the course of the President’s first 100 days.[34]

On February 18, 2025, the Trump Administration issued "an official Stop Work Order for all activities" under the legal services for UC contract[35], suspending legal representation while allowing only "Know Your Rights" presentations to continue. This began a chaotic pattern: funding briefly resumed, was halted again on March 21[36], then reinstated on April 30 following a lawsuit, extending services only through September 2025, with the future of the program unknown. These actions directly contradict the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2008, which established crucial safeguards for UC to prevent trafficking, exploitation, and wrongful deportation. TVPRA requires UC to receive access to legal counsel "to the greatest extent practicable," recognizing their vulnerability as potential trafficking victims who need legal advocacy to pursue protection under asylum or Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

The elimination of legal services creates a troubling disparity: while children in state child welfare proceedings receive court-appointed guardians ad litem or special advocates as a condition of federal funding, unaccompanied children in immigration court—many under 14 years old—must face judges and government attorneys without guaranteed representation. UC are left to navigate complex immigration proceedings without adequate legal guidance, dramatically increasing their risk of deportation, family separation, and exploitation. The repeated disruptions to legal funding compound this harm by creating service instability that further jeopardizes children already facing trauma and uncertainty, abandoning fundamental principles of child welfare and justice.



## Social Work Implications

The immigration policies enacted by President Trump's administration in the first 100 days present several urgent ethical challenges, directly conflicting with the core values outlined in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics. These challenges include: violating the dignity and worth of all people, the importance of human relationships, and social justice. Social workers are committed to promoting the well-being of children and families, protecting human rights, and advancing social justice. Furthermore, the NASW emphasizes a special responsibility to support "people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty",[37] including children and immigrants who are disproportionately targeted by restrictive immigration policies. The analyses within this brief shed light on important ethical implications for asylum seekers and refugees, border enforcement, deportation, the elimination of legal services for immigrant children, and family detention.

The NASW Code of Ethics is a set of guidelines established by the National Association of Social Workers to define the core values, ethical principles, and standards that guide the professional conduct of social workers in the U.S.

**Dignity and Worth of the Person**

Several immigration policies enacted during this period directly undermine human dignity by: exacerbating trauma, criminalizing migration, and blocking access to safety and reunification. These include the executive orders and accompanying policy changes that impact asylum seekers and refugees. Specifically, the narrowing of asylum eligibility contradicts one's dignity and worth by exacerbating trauma among already marginalized groups. Children denied protection are placed at further risk of trafficking, family separation, and long-term psychological harm. Expanded deportation efforts violate the dignity and worth of immigrants, including unaccompanied children, by attempting to overlook their lived experiences and criminalize their attempt to seek safety. The cessation of refugee processing and reunification efforts reflects a deliberate devaluation of human dignity and fails to uphold the principle that all individuals deserve access to safety and care. In this context, social workers must act as both advocates and care providers supporting families while calling for policy change that realigns immigration enforcement with humanitarian values and trauma-informed practice.

**Social Justice**

Policies that violate social work's value of social justice include border enforcement measures and attempts to limit access to legal services. The restrictive border enforcement measures undertaken by President Trump's administration violate social work's value of social justice by overlooking due process for migrants seeking asylum. In a similar manner, the elimination of legal services for immigrant children presents several ethical concerns: it violates ethical obligations to protect the vulnerable; it ignores the international principle of promoting the best interests of the child; and it undermines the notion of due process by expecting that children from infancy through adolescence and from other cultures and languages can represent themselves in court.

**Human Relationships**

Immigration policies enacted across the first 100 days of President Trump's administration also violate social work's value of the importance of human relationships. Policies that forcibly separate families or prevent reunification under programs not only inflict trauma but directly undermine the foundational belief in the sanctity of family bonds. Family separation is not simply a legal or political issue; it is a profound rupture of the most basic human relationship—the parent-child bond—which social workers are ethically bound to protect.

## Policy Recommendations

The immigration policies enacted during President Trump's first 100 days have created urgent threats to the safety and wellbeing of immigrant children and their families that demand immediate policy intervention. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for restoring humanitarian principles to immigration policy, protecting

vulnerable children, and ensuring that families can access the services and protections they need to thrive in their communities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**



End Family Separation and Family Detention



Strengthen Due Process and Legal Protections for Unaccompanied Children



Address the Chilling Effect through Clear Policy Guidance and Enforcement

***End Family Separation and Family Detention***

The use of family separation as an immigration deterrence strategy should be terminated and child protection standards in accordance with the Flores Settlement Agreement should be restored. Furthermore, the practice of family detention should be eliminated by enacting legislation that mandates the use of community-based alternatives such as case management programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in ensuring court compliance without relying on detention. To support the safety and unity of children and families amid the current policy climate, we recommend the following:

The 1997 Flores Settlement Agreement, established following litigation over inhumane detention conditions, sets national minimum standards for the treatment, placement, and release of detained immigrant children.

- **Prohibit Family Separation in Immigration Enforcement:** Federal law must codify a comprehensive ban on family separation, permitting separation only in cases of documented safety risk to the child. This requires prohibiting harmful enforcement policies like "zero tolerance" that criminalize border crossings and systematically justify family separation. Any proposed separation must undergo judicial review with mandatory child welfare assessments conducted by qualified professionals before implementation.

- **End Family and Child Detention:** The use of immigration detention for children and families must be eliminated and replaced with proven community-based alternatives including case management, legal support programs, and other non-custodial supervision methods. Priority release should be granted to vulnerable populations, particularly asylum seekers and families with young children, who face heightened risks in detention settings and benefit most from community support.

- **Strengthen Oversight of Enforcement Agencies:** Independent oversight of ICE and CBP must be significantly expanded, with particular focus on actions involving families and children. Agencies should be required to provide transparent, regular reporting on all separations and detentions, including justifications and outcomes. Civil rights offices must be empowered with adequate resources and authority to investigate violations of family integrity and hold officials accountable for harmful practices.

***Strengthen Due Process and Legal Protections for Unaccompanied Children***

Across the first 100 days of President Trump's administration, there has been a concerted effort to dismantle access to legal counsel for unaccompanied children. The government should guarantee access to legal counsel for all children and families in removal proceedings, including the expansion of funding for legal orientation programs and pro bono networks. To ensure UC have the support needed to navigate the complexity of the immigration court system, we recommend the following:

- **Restore and Guarantee Legal Representation:** The executive branch must immediately withdraw all executive orders that limit or impede UC's access to legal representation and know-your-rights presentations. This includes reversing the chaotic pattern of funding suspensions that has left children without

counsel during critical proceedings. Legal representation should be recognized as a fundamental requirement, not a discretionary service, given children's developmental limitations and the life-altering consequences of immigration decisions.

- **Establish Sustainable Funding for Legal Services:** Congress must include dedicated, long-term funding for legal representation of UC in federal budgets to ensure program sustainability and prevent future disruptions. This funding should support not only direct representation but also legal orientation programs, interpreter services, and specialized training for attorneys working with traumatized children. Stable funding mechanisms will enable service providers to maintain consistent staffing and develop the expertise necessary to serve this vulnerable population effectively.

- **Center the Best Interests of the Child in All Proceedings:** U.S. immigration laws and policies must be reformed to prioritize the best interests of the child as the primary consideration in all decisions affecting unaccompanied minors. This requires comprehensive training for immigration judges, attorneys, and court personnel to recognize and respond appropriately to children's unique developmental needs, trauma histories, and cultural backgrounds.

***Address the Chilling Effect through Clear Policy Guidance and Enforcement***

The climate of fear generated by restrictive immigration policies has created a devastating chilling effect that deters families, regardless of immigration status, from accessing essential services for themselves and their children. This phenomenon causes toxic stress that harms children's development and undermines public health outcomes as families avoid healthcare, education, housing, and food assistance due to fears of surveillance, detention, and deportation. Federal agencies should issue clear guidance establishing that immigration status cannot be a barrier to accessing these critical services, while implementing robust enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance and restore community trust. To mitigate this chilling effect and ensure that immigrant children and families can access the essential services to support their health, safety, and wellbeing, we recommend:

- **Reinstate Sensitive Locations Protections:** Joint Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) sensitive locations policy guidance must be reinstated and strengthened to prohibit immigration enforcement actions in or near healthcare facilities, schools, places of worship, and other essential community institutions. These protections are fundamental to ensuring that children can attend school, families can seek medical care, and communities can gather for religious and social support without fear of detention or deportation. Clear enforcement mechanisms and penalties for violations must accompany these protections to ensure they are adhered to by immigration officials.

- **Clarify Public Benefits Access and Public Charge Rule:** HHS must reaffirm and expand guidance clarifying that receipt of services for U.S.-citizen children, vaccinations, community health services, mental health care, and substance abuse treatment are not considered under public charge determinations for immigration cases. This guidance should be accompanied by comprehensive outreach campaigns in multiple languages to ensure families understand their rights. Additionally, healthcare access should be expanded regardless of immigration status to promote positive health outcomes for all community members, following models like California's Medi-Cal expansion.

- **Protect Educational Rights and Access:** The U.S. Department of Education must reaffirm and strengthen guidance protecting immigrant and undocumented children's right to safe, appropriate public education free from immigration enforcement interference. This includes prohibiting the collection or sharing of immigration status information by school personnel and establishing clear protocols for responding to immigration enforcement requests. Schools must be designated as safe havens where children can learn and develop

without fear, supported by comprehensive training for educators and administrators on these protections.

- **Ensure Coordinated Implementation and Oversight:** Federal and state agencies must establish coordinated mechanisms to disseminate guidance effectively, train frontline service providers across sectors, and implement robust oversight to ensure compliance with access protections. Strong protections and consistent messaging are essential to uphold children's rights, rebuild trust in public institutions, and mitigate long-term negative outcomes caused by exclusionary policies.

## Conclusion

The immigration policies enacted in President Trump's first 100 days have created a profound crisis for immigrant children and their families. These policies—from family separation and detention to the elimination of legal services for unaccompanied children—have systematically undermined the safety, wellbeing, and fundamental rights of this vulnerable population.

For immigrant families, these policies represent a systematic assault on family integrity and child wellbeing. Family separation through deportation and detention severs the parent-child bonds that are foundational to healthy development. Parents under the threat of immigration enforcement struggle to maintain the stability and reassurance children require. The constant fear of detection prevents families from fully engaging in their communities, increasing the chilling effects that deter families from accessing essential healthcare, education, and social services. The impact on children is both immediate and devastating, as children in immigrant families live in constant fear of separation, leading to trauma, anxiety, and depression.

The policies examined in this brief directly contradict social work's core values of human dignity, social justice, and the importance of human relationships. More fundamentally, they ignore decades of research demonstrating that family unity, legal protections, and community support are essential to healthy child development and wellbeing. The policy recommendations call for ending family separation and detention, strengthening legal protections for unaccompanied children, and mitigating chilling effects. These represent critical steps toward restoring child welfare principles to immigration policy and protecting the wellbeing of immigrant children and their families.

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## ABOUT THE CICW

The Center on Immigration and Child Welfare Initiative (CICW) is housed in the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley. The CICW promotes the welfare of children of immigrants and their families through original research, resource development and distribution, training and technical assistance, and national leadership. Learn more by visiting our website at www.cimmcw.org.

The CICW Research Workgroup consists of scholars from across the U.S. whose research focuses on a variety of issues at the intersection of child welfare, child wellbeing, and immigration as they impact immigrant and refugee children, youth, and families. Learn more about the CICW's research affiliates and the authors of this brief at https://cimmcw.org/research-statement-affiliates/.

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