



# THE CENTER ON IMMIGRATION AND CHILD WELFARE

## **Statement on Immigration Executive Actions**

*A Product of the CICW Law & Policy Committee*

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The Center on Immigration and Child Welfare (CICW) promotes the well-being of immigrant children and families through research, education, policy recommendations, and national leadership.

CICW supports President Obama's immigration executive actions as an important step forward in promoting the well-being of children in immigrant families. President Obama's expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) will expand eligibility for deferred action to undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. before they were age 16, regardless of their current age, and who have been living continuously in the country since January 1, 2010 and meet education and other requirements. If implemented, President Obama's immigration executive action also extends deferred action to undocumented immigrant parents of U.S. citizen and lawful permanent resident children through the Deferred Action for Parents of American and Lawful Permanent Residents program (DAPA).<sup>1</sup>

While a federal court order is currently blocking the launch of expanded deferred action programs, the Obama administration has taken steps to appeal this decision. CICW supports the Obama administration's expanded deferred action programs for the following reasons:

- **These programs have the potential to keep children and families together.** Under the current system, children and parents in mixed status families may be separated at any moment due to parental detention and deportation. In 2013, the

Department of Homeland Security reported that the agency had deported more than 72,410 parents of U.S. citizen children.<sup>ii</sup> Temporary relief from detention and deportation can keep children and families together.

- **These programs have the potential to prevent child welfare system involvement.** According to a report published in 2011, approximately 5,100 children with a detained or deported parent are in the foster care system.<sup>iii</sup> Detention or deportation of a parent increases a child's risk for child welfare involvement due to additional stressors and financial hardship on children and families left behind. In some cases, a child may unnecessarily enter the foster care system as a direct result of parental detention and deportation, and once they enter the foster care system, children whose parents are detained or deported face multiple barriers to reunification. Expanded deferred action programs have the potential to both prevent entry into the child welfare system and to decrease barriers to reunification among child welfare system-involved mixed status families.
- **Expanded deferred action promotes children's physical, emotional, and economic well-being.** Children who live in constant fear of parental separation due to detention or deportation are at increased risk for negative physical and mental health, education, and economic outcomes.<sup>iv</sup> Research also reveals that a parent's undocumented status has a significant impact on children's development and economic well-being due to the limited employment options and psychological stress facing undocumented parents and the reluctance of parents to apply for public benefits on behalf of their U.S. citizen children due to fear of government agencies.<sup>v</sup> By providing parents with relief from deportation and work authorization, expanded deferred action programs can promote both enhanced economic stability for immigrant families and positive physical and mental health outcomes for children and other family members.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Additional information on President Obama's executive action is available at <http://www.dhs.gov/immigration.action>

<sup>ii</sup> Foley, E. (June 2014). "Deportation Separated Thousands of U.S.-born Children from Parents in 2013." Washington, DC: *Huffington Post*.

<sup>iii</sup> Wessler, S. (November 2011). *Shattered Families: The Perilous Intersection of the Immigration Enforcement and Child Welfare System*. New York City, NY: Race Forward.

<sup>iv</sup> Satinsky, S., Hu, A., Heller, J., & Farhang, L. (June 2013). *Family Unity, Family Health: How Family-Focused Immigration Reform Will Mean Better Health for Children and Families*. Oakland, CA: Human Impact Partners.

<sup>v</sup> Suro, R., Suárez-Orozco, M., & Canizales, S. (April 2015). *Removing Insecurity: How American Children Will Benefit from President Obama's Executive Action on Immigration*. Los Angeles, CA: Tomás Rivera Policy Institute at USC and the Institute for Immigration, Globalization, and Education at UCLA.

<sup>vi</sup> Yoshikawa, H. & Kholoptseva, J. (March 2013). *Unauthorized immigrant Parents and Their Children's Development: A Summary of the Evidence*. Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute.

<sup>vii</sup> Cervantes, W. (December 2014). *A Step Forward: Immigration Executive Actions and Our Nation's Children*. Washington, DC: First Focus Center for the Children of Immigrants.