

MFP
MOVEMENT FOR
FAMILY POWER

BAJI
BLACK ALLIANCE
FOR JUST IMMIGRATION

**ADVANCEMENT
PROJECT**

ISSUE BRIEF JUNE 2026

STOP OUR TAKING CHILDREN

ABOLISH ICE, THE COPS, & THE FAMILY POLICE

Context

Deadly immigration enforcement under the second Trump administration has re-ignited widespread resistance to abolish ICE. ICE budgets have ballooned while social safety nets have been gutted. Masked agents are occupying our cities, kidnapping people off the street, from their communities, hospitals, schools, and churches. People are snatched into unmarked vehicles, taken to detention centers, and disappeared.

During the first Trump administration, nothing generated more political will to abolish ICE than the forced separation of families. That activation has been renewed as family separation and the kidnapping of children becomes impossible for the public to ignore. When photos of ICE agents detaining five-year-old Liam Ramos circulated in January 2026, the outrage was immediate. Children have been—and never stopped being—kidnapped, detained, deported, and separated from their families.

Amid this outrage, there is growing understanding that we cannot abolish ICE without abolishing the police. Targeting one system while ignoring the other just moves pieces on the state's chessboard. Less understood is that we cannot achieve either without also abolishing the family policing system.

Often referred to as the child “welfare” or foster “care” system, the family policing system tends to escape wide-spread public attention by operating under the banner of child safety. However, like the immigration and criminal legal systems, the family policing system is powered by anti-Blackness to determine which families are treated as deserving of safety and family integrity—and which are not.

1 in 2 Black children will experience a family policing investigation before they turn 18.

When a parent is detained by ICE or the cops, or deported, their children can be thrown into the violence-ridden foster system, where reunification becomes harder and the family policing system begins a 15-month countdown toward permanent family separation through the termination of parental rights. In a cycle of punishment, families already caught in the family policing system face heightened exposure to the police and ICE—especially as collusion increases through 287(g) agreements and other collaborations.

STOP (Stop Taking Our People) is the Black Alliance for Just Immigration's narrative frame that names the violence of immigration enforcement and policing. STOP calls on us to SEE ONE SYSTEM, NOT SILOS—treating policing, prisons, detention, deportation, and protest criminalization as parts of the same machine.



This issue brief, *Stop Taking Our Children*, calls on us to treat the family policing system as part of that machine—seeing the immigration, criminal legal, and family policing systems as one family separation web.

6.3M

children live with at least one undocumented parent.

Source: [Migration Policy Institute](#)

145K

immigrant children separated from a parent.

Source: [Truthout](#)

6,300

children detained in ICE custody.

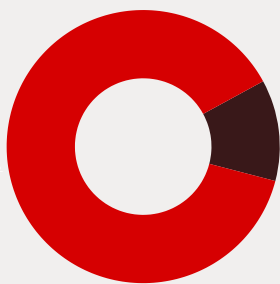
Source: [CBS News](#)

232

children forced into the foster system due to ICE in 2025.

Source: [Adoption & Foster Care Analysis & Reporting System](#)

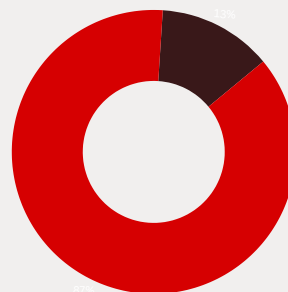
The family separation web poses a unique threat to the over **5 MILLION BLACK IMMIGRANTS** who are disproportionately targeted by cops, ICE, and the family police.



Black immigrants make up

12%

of all Black residents.



13%

of Black immigrants are undocumented.

Source: [FWD.US](#)

They are taking our children, but we won't stop fighting to get them back.

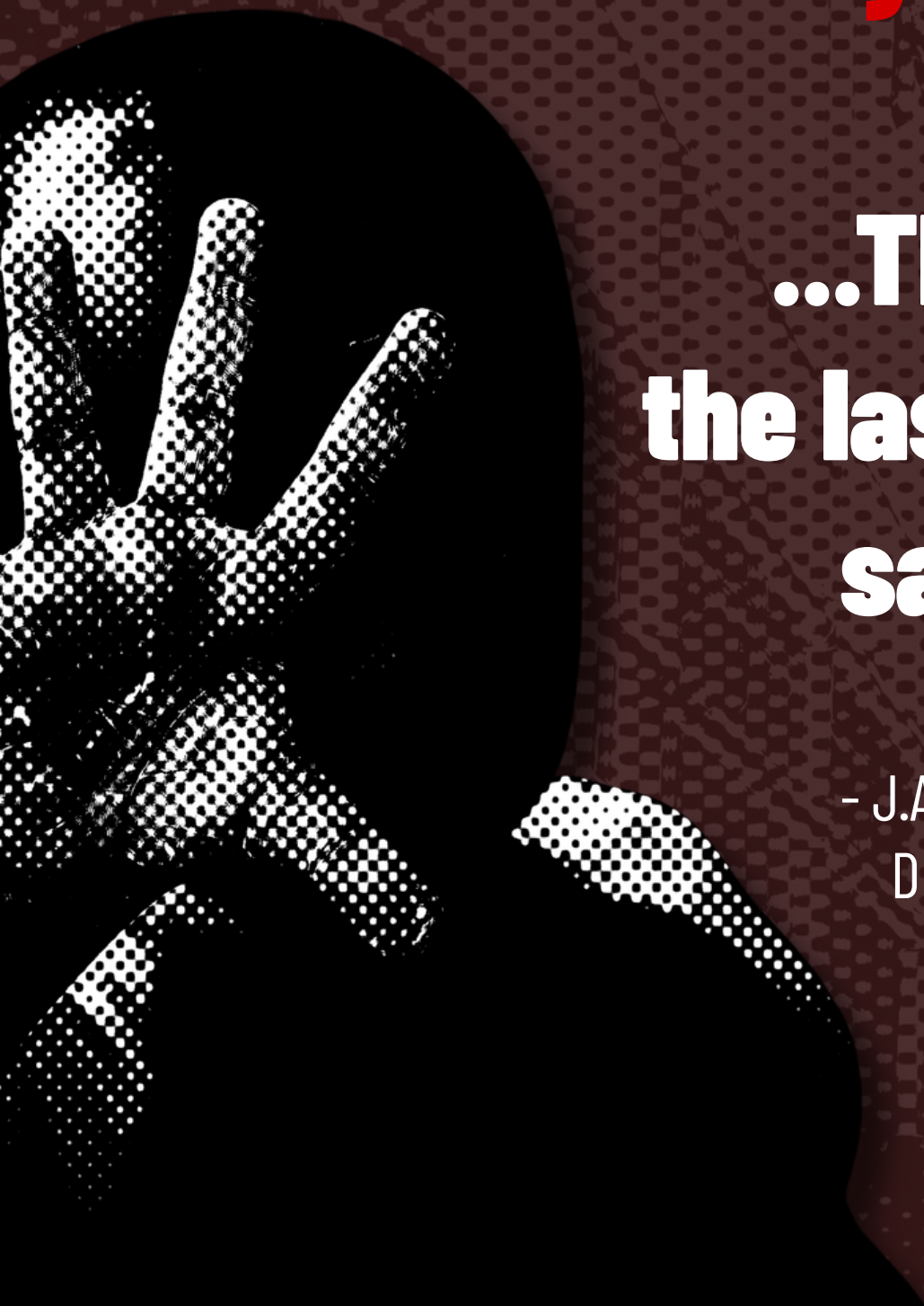
To achieve true freedom for Black immigrant families, we must abolish all systems that separate our families and take our children.

**"I asked if I could give
my Dad a hug goodbye,
and **they said no.****

**...That was
the last time I
saw him."**

- J.A.I., A 16-YEAR-OLD
DETAINED AT DILLEY

SOURCE: CHILDREN'S RIGHTS



The Violence of Family Separation

Regardless of the mechanism, family separation is one of the most violent actions a government can inflict on a child—and on their parents. The research is unambiguous: forced separation causes lasting psychological harm, disrupts development, and fractures the familial bonds children depend on to survive.

Children separated from their parents experience depression, anxiety, intense crying and fear, inability to sleep—with effects on their physical and mental health that follow them into adulthood. Many experience separation as profound grief, similar to the death of a parent.

For parents, the harm is just as devastating. Many have lost not only their children but their partners and co-parents—leaving them with less income and less support to keep their families whole. Parents separated from their children often experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideations. And the damage can begin long before a separation even happens, where the fear of family separation is its own form of violence inflicted by the state.

Many parents are so afraid that seeking help will lead to family separation—whether through a police or ICE arrest or a report to the family police—that they avoid critical medical and

mental health care. These fears are not unwarranted. Nayra Guzmán was arrested and detained on her way to the hospital to visit her newborn in the NICU—just 15 days after giving birth. And medical professionals are the third-largest source of family policing reports each year, behind only police and educators.

Today, ICE's own policy states that pregnant, postpartum, and nursing people should not be detained except in exceptional circumstances. This is being ignored. Pregnant people are being detained into egregious detention conditions—without food, without beds, shackled at the hands, wrists, and feet. Many are miscarrying without any prenatal or medical care. Pregnant teens—some as young as 13, and many survivors of rape—have reportedly been transferred to a detention center in Texas specifically because of its restrictions on abortion. Many have since disappeared; ICE officials refuse to give answers.

“It’s like a death. We’re mourning the physical loss of him.”

– MILDRED DANIS-TAYLOR

ICE agents dragged Mildred’s husband, Rodney Taylor, a Liberian-born father and double amputee, from his car while their two youngest children watched from the backseat. He was detained, away from his wife and family, for over fifteen months.

Source: Saporta Report



These harms are not an accident. A [2024 Human Rights Watch](#) report on family separations during the first Trump administration documents that forced family separation is “a deliberate, targeted policy choice taken even though the architects of the policy knew or should have known that it would inflict anguish and suffering on families.”

FAMILY SEPARATION IS A TOOL OF **RACIAL & REPRODUCTIVE CONTROL.**

AND IT DID NOT START WITH ICE.

ICE is expanding a centuries-long strategy of forced family separation—from chattel slavery, to Indigenous genocide, to the family policing and criminal legal systems. Taking children has always been a tool of racial and reproductive control—determining who gets to birth, who gets to parent, and who gets to raise their children in a safe and sustainable community.

THE THREAT OF FAMILY SEPARATION IS EVERYWHERE.



ICE IS NOW ALLOWED TO TARGET "SENSITIVE LOCATIONS" LIKE HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS, AND PLACES OF WORSHIP.

LOCAL COPS ARE DEPUTIZED TO ENFORCE IMMIGRATION LAWS, QUESTIONING PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR IMMIGRATION STATUS DURING ARRESTS & TRAFFIC STOPS.



DOCTORS, TEACHERS, SOCIAL WORKERS, AND OTHERS TREAT SYMPTOMS OF POVERTY AS CHILD MALTREATMENT AND REPORT PARENTS TO THE FAMILY POLICING SYSTEM.



The Family Policing System & Family Death Penalty

THROWN INTO THE FOSTER SYSTEM

ProPublica reports that Trump is deporting about four times as many mothers of U.S. citizen children per day as Biden did. When a parent is detained or deported, children can be forced to navigate the impossible alone. Some remain with a designated backup caregiver—or are left in the unofficial care of neighbors, older siblings, or whoever is available. In 2025, at least 232 children* were forced into the foster system.

To protect against the foster system, grassroots and legal organizations across the nation have mobilized to help families create Family Preparedness Plans: designating a backup caregiver for their children in case they are detained or deported. That caregiver must be cleared by the state. Critically, in communities where entire networks of family and friends face the same threats, that clearance can be difficult to obtain—and can keep children stuck in the foster system even when there is a safe adult prepared to care for them.

*NOTE: This is likely a massive undercount. Estimates are compiled using state-level data that is reported unreliably and inconsistently.

“If they take me, who will protect my children?”

– JEAN-PIERROT PIERRE

A Haitian father of two.

Source: Haitian Times

“Unaccompanied” children—or children who come to the US without the presence of a parent—are routinely thrown into state custody too. Teenagers are often confined to shelters, while younger children may stay in foster placements. Even when parents are located, nearby, and able to care for them, the state may refuse to give parents their kids back.

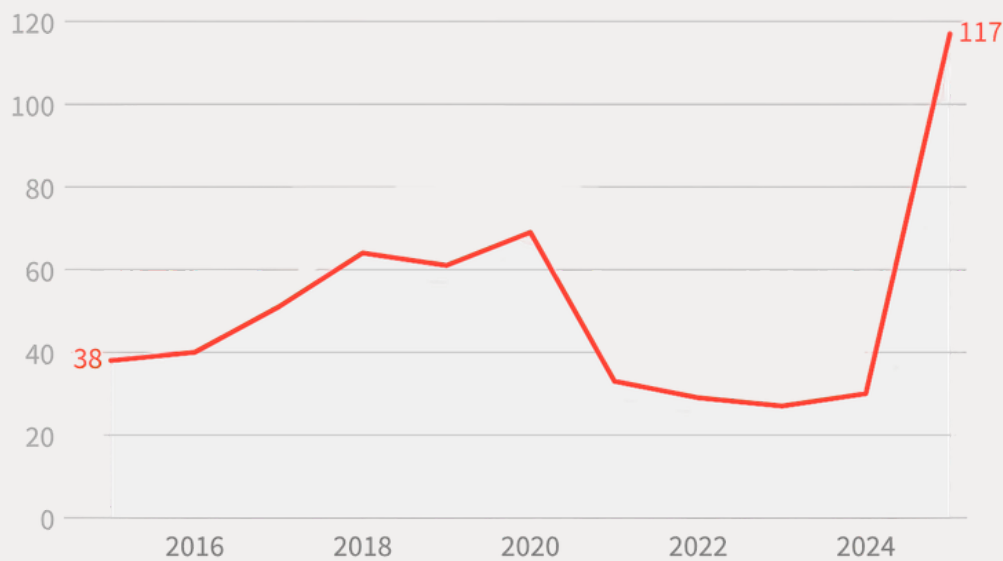
New York families report that agencies “kept moving the goalposts” for reunification, all while children dealt with dirty clothes, confinement, and inadequate meals. Staff told children that if they complained, their parents would be deported.

ADVOCACY TIP

To protect against the foster system, parents should create a Family Preparedness Plan, identifying a back-up caregiver with legal status or U.S. citizenship, and a plan for reunification in the event of an emergency.

Check out the resource list at the end of this brief.

AVERAGE DAYS “UNACCOMPANIED” CHILDREN SPEND IN STATE CUSTODY OVER TIME:



Source: Office of Refugee Resettlement
Credit: [Judy Lin/KFF Health News](#)

The average time unaccompanied children spend in state custody has nearly quadrupled, from 30 days in 2024 to 117 days in 2025.

Now, the administration is doubling down on a thoroughly debunked claim that 300,000 unaccompanied children went “missing” under the Biden administration and ended up in the hands of adults who are abusing them. They are using this lie to justify re-detaining children who were released to vetted sponsors—often their own parents—and throwing them into prison-like shelters. At least 300 children have been re-detained, many of whom are now experiencing intense anxiety, depression, and self-harm because of the separation.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement is forcing caregivers to restart the entire sponsorship application process, made harder still by the administration's increasingly restrictive screening requirements designed to exclude undocumented people.

“I feel like I’m suffocating inside this shelter, trapped with no way out.”

– ANONYMOUS

A 14-year-old detained at a shelter in Texas.

Source: [KFF Health News](#)

ICE is then exploiting the process further, using sponsor interviews as bait to arrest and detain those who show up trying to bring their children home—leveraging its power to control and criminalize families as intended.

ICE has used children to bait at least 100 parents and caregivers into arrest.

**"It is not right that I have
to stay here for so long
when I have someone to
take care of me who
knows me and
loves me."**

- ANONYMOUS

SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER
FOR YOUTH LAW,
ANGELICA S. V. HHS



"I never imagined that I would be separated from my grandchildren or that it would be so difficult to get them back. They have now spent a big part of their lives living with strangers and moving from one place to another.

I try to speak to them by video call every day but it is not enough, especially when they are so little and cannot understand why I am not bringing them home."

- ANONYMOUS

SOURCE: NATIONAL CENTER FOR YOUTH LAW, ANGELICA S. V. HHS

UNDER FAMILY POLICING SURVEILLANCE

As immigrant parents navigate the constant threat of police and ICE, Black and Brown immigrant parents are also disproportionately targeted by the family policing system. Under mandated reporting laws, doctors, teachers, social workers, and others are required to report suspicions of child maltreatment to the family policing system. The state's definitions of reportable "child maltreatment" are intentionally vague, allowing racial and anti-immigrant bias to determine who gets flagged. Situations like a child coming to school without lunch or remaining at home while a parent is at work can trigger a report.

Symptoms of poverty are treated as parenting failures, rather than what they are: the predictable result of government policies that restrict immigrant parents from accessing already limited social supports.

Worse yet, the very steps immigrant families may take to protect themselves from ICE can get them reported to the family policing system. For example, families may keep their children home from school to protect them from ICE raids—but doing so risks a report to the family policing system for excessive absences or "educational neglect."

In some cases, parents are fighting a family policing case for alleged child maltreatment at the same time as they are fighting deportation – and children may already be in the foster system when a parent is detained or deported. This can make reunification even harder. Advocates have long documented that detention makes it nearly impossible for parents to comply with family reunification plans.

PRISON BY OTHER NAMES

In March 2025, the federal government re-instituted family detention centers: prison-like facilities where children, including infants, are held alongside their parents. The amount of time children spend in these facilities has more than doubled since October 2025. Some argue this is a "more humane" alternative—but both detention and family separation undeniably devastate a child's health, safety, and well-being. We reject the premise that the ICE machine can be made better by caging families together. Detaining instead of releasing people while their immigration cases are pending is a policy choice. No parent, no child, no person should be caged. No family should be separated.

YOUR RIGHTS

Parents who are detained by ICE have the right to make appearances in "child welfare" proceedings to maintain or regain custody of their children. ICE must also facilitate remote participation in court or mandated services, programs, trainings, and visitation.

Check out the resource list at the end of this brief.

CAUGHT IN THE FAMILY SEPARATION WEB

Many do not realize that a report to the family police can set off a chain of events that ends in deportation. The family policing system routinely shares information with the police—and in many states, agencies automatically refer certain allegations to law enforcement. Perinatal substance use is one example where this is the case: in 13 states, family policing agencies automatically report pregnant people to the police for a positive drug test.

Meanwhile, local police are being increasingly deputized to enforce immigration law through 287(g) agreements and other arrangements.

287(g) agreements have increased 957% under the Trump administration.

287(g) agreements give local police authority to question people about their immigration status during arrests, and to hold people in local jails before handing them over to ICE.

76% of Black immigrants who are deported, are deported because of contact with the police or criminal legal system.

More collusion between local police and ICE means more children will be separated from their parents, and families will face more barriers to reunification once they are.

In counties with 287(g) agreements in 2011, children in the foster system were 29% more likely to have a detained or deported parent.**

**No equivalent data exists today—but since 287(g) agreements have expanded dramatically under the second Trump administration, there is reason to believe these consequences have worsened.

In some cases, family policing agencies have skipped the chain entirely, calling ICE directly on undocumented children and families.

THREATENED WITH THE FAMILY DEATH PENALTY

Once a child is in the foster system, a clock starts ticking towards permanent family separation. After fifteen months, a federal law called the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) requires and pays states to begin proceedings to terminate parental rights, severing every legal tie between a parent and child and “freeing” the child to be adopted by someone else. We call this the family death penalty, because it is the most severe punishment a government can inflict on a family. It can mark the last time a child is allowed to speak to their parents.

1 in 41 Black children will experience the family death penalty.

In these cruel proceedings, a parent who has been detained or deported can be framed as having “abandoned” their child. If a parent is deported, agents of the family policing system

frequently advocate for children to stay in the foster system without their family rather than be reunified with their parent in another country—including when this is at odds with the wishes of the parent and child. Even the risk of being deported can be used to deny reunification.

The family death penalty doesn't just sever legal ties—it cuts off legal protections too. A child can lose the ability to gain citizenship through their parent. A parent can lose the ability to show that their deportation would cause serious hardship to their child—an argument that can be used to support protection from deportation.

And as parents are disappeared, the state is actively recruiting strangers to become foster placements and to adopt their children—severing them from their families, cultures, and communities in service of a white supremacist vision of who is allowed to parent.

MARKED A 'BAD PARENT'

The idea that only some immigrants are "deserving" of safety isn't just white supremacist ideology, it is written into immigration law. Many forms of immigration status and protection require proof of "good moral character." This makes the family policing system a tool for the state to generate the kind of evidence that can further justify deportation.

Simply having a family policing case can make a family more vulnerable to ICE. Take orders of protection—legal orders that are sometimes issued during family policing cases—for example. These orders are stored in a federal database that ICE can access for up to five years. If a parent is found to have violated one, it can be treated as grounds for deportation.

During a family policing case, parents can be required to admit to substance use or attend substance use treatment in order to get their children back. But even a simple admission of substance use—including of marijuana in states where it is legal—can be used to justify deportation.



Intersectional Movements to End Family Separation

As our communities mobilize to protect each other, we have an opportunity to deepen our analysis of family separation as a core strategy across systems. This will allow us to advance truly intersectional movement strategies and dismantle the entirety of the family separation web. When family policing abolitionists challenge mandated reporting laws, we can educate professionals on the grave risk of a report for immigrant families—and how mandated reporters can reduce risk by minimizing sensitive information documented in their notes and referring only to non-punitive services. When immigrant justice advocates push to end collaborations between ICE and local police, we can include the family policing system in that demand. Reckoning with these intersections will only deepen solidarity, jam the gears of the ICE machine, and strengthen our collective power to end all forms of forced family separation.

They are taking our children, but we won't stop fighting to get them back.

RESOURCES

TO DISRUPT & RESIST

- [Stop Taking Our People Framework](#) by BAJI
- [Stolen Children's Month Campaign](#) with Ashley Albert, MFP, & Partners
- [Block It! A Mini Toolkit to Take Action to Disrupt the ICE Kidnapping, Detention, and Deportation Machine](#) by Interrupting Criminalization

TO ADVOCATE

- [Step-by-Step Family Preparedness Plan](#) by Immigrant Legal Resource Center
- [How Child Welfare Agencies and Immigration Attorneys Can Advocate with ICE for Fair Treatment of Detained or Deported Parents](#) by Immigrant Legal Resource Center
- [Five Things Parents Detained by ICE Should Know](#) by National Immigration Law Center
- [Safety Planning Tools \(Maryland\)](#) by Standby Guardian Project
- [Explainer for Parents and Their Helpers Seeking Family Reunification](#) by Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights

TO LEARN

- [Breaking Borders: Interconnections Between Immigrant Justice, Family Policing Abolition, & Reproductive Justice](#) with BAJI, MFP, & Partners
- [Entangled Roots: The Role of Race in Policies that Separate Families](#) by Center for the Study of Social Policy
- [Fammigration Web](#) by S. Lisa Washington
- [Shattered Families](#) by Race Forward
- [Criminalizing Blackness Report: An Analysis of The Impacts of the 1994 Crime Bill and 1996 Immigration Bill on Black People](#) by Movement for Black Lives, BAJI, UndocuBlack, & Law for Black Lives Contributor

MFP
MOVEMENT FOR
FAMILY POWER

BAJI
BLACK ALLIANCE
FOR JUST IMMIGRATION

**ADVANCEMENT
PROJECT**