



Bethany Christian Services Recommends Alternatives to Detention for Families at Southern Border

“Bethany Christian Services remains dedicated to reunifying separated children with their families, and we will not rest until every separated child is safely reunified. Our mission has always been, and will always be, to keep and bring families together.”

– Bethany Christian Services CEO & President Chris Palusky

As Bethany Christian Services works diligently to reunify all separated refugee children in its care with the children’s families, the organization remains steadfast that alternatives to family separation and family detention should be prioritized. Bethany recommends the following steps be taken to bring and keep families together.

Enable rapid reunification of families by:

- Respect the rights of parents and children to select their preferred reunification plan.
- End the practice of sharing fingerprints and other household data between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Homeland Security. Bethany is deeply concerned that this new practice could cause parents to leave their children in the government’s care rather than risk their safety or the safety of other family members. Providing a safe and loving home for children should not be dependent on your immigration status.

Prioritize alternatives to jailing refugee children and families:

- *Dignified:* Individuals who are ultimately granted asylum wait approximately three years on average for relief. Asylum seeking families should be treated with dignity and respect not jailed.
- *Affordable:* One hugely successful model that Bethany helped develop is called the Family Case Management Program, which allowed families to live outside of detention during their immigration proceedings for a fraction of the cost of detention beds - \$36 per family per day compared to the \$319 per family per day requested by the Department of Homeland Security to jail refugee families.
- *Effective:* Families in the Family Case Management Program complied with 99 percent of their required immigration proceedings before the program was prematurely ended.

Expand community-based and mental health care for actual unaccompanied children:

- Children do not belong in tent cities on military bases or in group care – they belong in families. Actual unaccompanied children should be able to live in foster homes while their parents or close relatives are found.
- Many reunified unaccompanied refugee children have also experienced trauma and prolonged family separation, yet fewer than 32 percent of children receive family reunification services.

Bethany Christian Services knows that what has been done cannot be changed overnight, but by prioritizing reunification, alternatives to jail, and expanding community-based and mental health care to those impacted, it is possible to put into action the humanity and compassion that our country was founded on.

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About Bethany Christian Services

Bethany Christian Services believes that every child deserves to be in a loving family. We have a heart for children, and we equip families to be the answer for children in need. One of the ways we do this is by assisting unaccompanied refugee children reunify with family and friends in the United States. Bethany staff accomplishes this by providing in-home social services for unaccompanied children in federal custody who have been identified as survivors of trafficking, fled community violence, have endured some type of abuse, or are being reunified with a caretaker. Bethany has been providing critical services to unaccompanied children for more than 40 years and since 2013, the organization has directly reunified 500 unaccompanied children with their family and assisted in reunifying nearly 5,000.