



February 8, 2019

The Honorable Diana DeGette  
Chair, Subcommittee on Oversight and  
Investigations  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2322 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman DeGette and Ranking Member Guthrie,

On behalf of the nation's more than 4 million registered nurses, including the many who dedicate their lives to the health and wellbeing of children, the American Nurses Association (ANA) and the American Academy of Nursing (AAN) call on Congress to take swift action to address the needs of migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking children and families impacted by the Administration's separation policy at the border.

Registered nurses are experienced in providing care in the face of trauma and understand the lasting harm that can result from the separation of families. Toxic stress is the result of experiencing frequent and ongoing adverse childhood events (ACEs), particularly in the absence of protective behaviors. Studies cited in the literature support that forcibly separating children from their parents increases the likelihood of these children experiencing toxic stress which may have long-lasting negative effects on their health and psychological well-being.<sup>1,2</sup> For children, parents' comfort and support plays an essential role in regulating stress levels.

Many of these children have fled difficult and stressful situations at home to come to the US. Their difficulties are exacerbated by their journey to the border and now these children are exposed to the traumatizing uncertainty of whether or not they will be reunited with their parents. The ANA and AAN have long supported the reduction of toxic stress associated with ACEs to improve the health of the nation. ACEs can affect brain development and impair mental, physical and emotional health for children that may have lasting negative effects throughout life. It is imperative Congress act to reduce and ultimately eliminate any additional ACEs that those in custody at our nation's border are enduring.

The Code of Ethics for Nurses (the Code) very clearly calls on all nurses to act to preserve the human rights of vulnerable groups such as children, women, and refugees, at all times. The Code also empowers

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<sup>1</sup> Building mental health and caring for vulnerable children: Increasing prevention, access, and equity. *Nursing Outlook*, Nov./Dec., 2018, Vol. 66, Pages 590-593.

<sup>2</sup> Toxic Stress: Urgent action needed to reduce exposure to toxic stress in pregnant women and young children. *Nursing Outlook*, Sep./Oct., 2016, Vol. 64, Issue 5, Pages 513-515.

nurses to protect the most vulnerable populations through educating and influencing leaders, legislators, and governmental agencies in all related health affairs. Their care is not a partisan issue, but rather, a human rights issue that is bolstered by the resolve of the American people to treat others with compassion. In that spirit, ANA and AAN urge you to leverage the full force of the committee's jurisdiction to bring a swift resolution to this policy that jeopardizes the current and future wellness of children.

Sincerely,



Ernest Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN  
President  
American Nurses Association



Karen Cox, PhD, RN, FAAN  
President  
American Academy of Nursing