

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
CHILD & ADOLESCENT
PSYCHIATRY

W W W . A A C A P . O R G

February 18, 2020

Jonathan H. Hayes
Director
Office of Refugee Resettlement
Administration for Children & Families
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Matthew T. Albence
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Director Hayes and Acting Director Albence:

On behalf of the 9,600 members of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), I write to condemn recently detailed actions by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that have betrayed otherwise confidential medical information.

As you know, this past Sunday's Washington Post front page featured the lead-in to a very disturbing story, "Trust and Consequences," chronicling the plight of an adolescent who had shared personal information with an ORR-employed therapist relating to his trauma, only to have his confidential conversations shared with ICE officials who used them against him in deportation proceedings. From our understanding of the facts, also detailed today by National Public Radio, this adolescent did not pose an imminent danger to himself or others, but instead expressed anger, as is often felt later by victims of trauma. To use such statements against this detainee, or others similarly situated, is contrary to accepted medical ethics and effective patient care. It is simply not right to do so.

As ORR considers ways to meet the medical and mental health needs of detainees, patient confidentiality must be the cornerstone of treatment, as an assurance first to the detainee and also to the mental health or other medical professionals with whom each will speak. To do less is to prosecute the very victims of violence and trauma seeking refuge in America, turning their sad stories against them.

We ask and implore your agencies to do better by the youth and families seeking asylum and safety in the United States. Please end the practice of breaching the confidentiality of patient detainees seeking mental health treatment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gaye Carlson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Gabrielle A. Carlson, MD
President