

Trump ICE officials believed immigrant children were reunited with parents too soon

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Washington, June 10 (RHC)-- Newly uncovered e-mails show that U.S. immigration officials under the Trump administration thought that immigrant families that were being separated at the border were being reunited too quickly, seemingly exposing that officials fully intended on using family separation as a means of punishing immigrants.

The e-mails, turned over as part of a lawsuit brought by families who are suing the government for their pain and suffering, show that immigration officials thought it was bad optics for families to be reunited quickly after being separated.

“Bottom line, our concern is that the adults that were separated from their children... will be returned to the [U.S. Border Patrol] immediately after the guilty plea is accepted by the Court,” wrote then-top

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) official Matthew Albence in May of 2018, just after the family separation policy went into effect across the southern border.

Albence raised concerns about the implementation of the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy of separating families, which caused massive and widespread suffering to the thousands of families who were separated, some of whom are still separated to this day.

"This will result in a situation in which the parents are back in the exact same facility as their children — possibly in a matter of hours — who have yet to be placed into [Office of Refugee Resettlement] custody," Albence continued. He then proposed to then-acting ICE director Tom Homan that border officials move migrant children to a separate facility "at an accelerated pace" and move their parents to adult-only facilities to ensure separation, while using cruel language to refer to the asylum seekers.

"The traditional [border patrol] approach of washing their hands of the aliens once they are done with them is not going to work in this situation," he wrote. Other officials backed up his concerns.

Weeks later, on May 26, Albence said that allowing families to be reunited quickly "obviously undermines the entire effort and the Dept is going to look completely ridiculous if we go through the effort of prosecuting only to send them to a [Family Residential Center] and out the door," referring to ICE's concentration camps at the border.

The Trump administration had denied that the family separation was an intentional part of the "zero tolerance" policy. But lawyers for the families say the e-mails make it clear that the separations were intentional — and that ultimately, the policy was designed to cause further suffering to families, even if they weren't being pursued for having broken the law. Notably, the policy failed at its supposed (and violent) aim of deterring border crossings, further confirming the senseless inhumanity of the family separations.

"Although the government told the public that family separation was merely a byproduct of a 'prosecution' policy, in fact it implemented a far broader policy of separating all families apprehended at the border regardless of whether the parents were prosecuted or even referred for prosecution," lawyers representing the asylum seekers wrote in a court filing this week.

If the intent of immigration officials at the time was to make families suffer, it worked. Parents have shared stories of their experiences being separated from their children, recounting suffering that goes beyond what the government should be allowed to inflict, advocates say.

"I cried every day. I asked God: 'What's going to happen to me? What's going to happen to my family?'" Fernando Arredondo, one of the parents involved in the current lawsuits against the Biden administration, recently told CBS. Arredondo went to the U.S. after his 17-year-old son was killed in Guatemala, their country of origin, and was separated from his 12-year-old daughter Andrea in 2018 and eventually deported. He was allowed to come back to the U.S. and reunite with his wife and other daughters in 2020.

Though the Biden administration claims to have stopped enforcing the policy, reports find that it is still ongoing — and families' requests for relief in their lawsuits against the Justice Department have faced resistance from the Biden administration, despite the president's promises on the campaign trail to provide justice to asylum seekers.



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