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SRCD Defends Legal Services for Migrant Children in Amicus Brief

SRCD worked with immigrant rights groups to defend unaccompanied migrant children's ability to have an attorney, after the federal government halted funding for legal services.

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SRCD elevated the scientific literature in an amicus brief in response to the federal government's decision to end legal services for unaccompanied migrant children.

Read the Amicus Brief Here

On March 21, 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) terminated funding for legal services for unaccompanied migrant children, many of whom have fled violence, persecution, or trafficking. This came after a stop-work notice from HHS no longer allowing non-profits to offer legal education, legal

consultations, or legal representation to unaccompanied children on their immigration case.

SRCD's efforts are more important than ever, given current policies that often ignore the scientific literature in ways that harm children and families. Federal policies, like the recent Supreme Court ruling that allows racial profiling of Latinx communities by federal immigration authorities in L.A., deepen the climate of fear surrounding immigration enforcement, and also increase the likelihood that children will face proceedings without legal representation.

Working with immigrant rights groups, SRCD's Policy Department helped to convene scholars to prepare the amicus brief, filed in the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. It details research on the developmental harms of denying legal representation to children navigating complex immigration proceedings.

Evidence underscores that removing legal representation from minors will cause both short- and long-term harm, as children are not developmentally equipped to represent themselves in legal settings. Furthermore, children without legal representation are at greater risk of abuse, trafficking, and exploitation.

SRCD urges policymakers to consider the lifelong developmental consequences of these federal decisions. We stand in solidarity with the children and families who are affected.

We want to thank SRCD's Policy Committee, SRCD Caucuses, and members for working with us in our work on this brief.

Read the Amicus Brief Here