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SRCD Issues Statement Calling for End to Immigration Enforcement Actions that Harm Children

Washington DC - January 26, 2026, In response to the detention and separation of young children from their families by federal immigration agencies, including enforcement actions in and around schools in Minnesota, New York City and other localities, SRCD's President Dr. Jennifer Lansford called lawmakers' attention to the "decades of research" about the harms of these practices to children and called for them to be "discontinued."

The full statement, below, specifically calls out the strong evidence about how such practices are "linked to increased anxiety, depression, and trauma" in children and persist into adulthood, where they interfere with "educational attainment, social relationships, and long-term well-being."

The statement came amidst a debate in Congress over immigration enforcement tactics, which have the potential to impact the developmental trajectories of one in four U.S. children who live with a foreign-born parent.

SRCD Statement on Immigration Raids and Child Detainments

Dear SRCD members,

It is deeply disturbing to continue to see reports of young children being detained and separated from their families through aggressive immigration enforcement actions in New York City, Minneapolis and other localities. These actions traumatize children and violate their fundamental right to the basics of child development—safety, education, health, and parental support; these actions must be discontinued.

We are particularly alarmed that children as young as preschool age are being detained in transit to and from school. Schools should be safe spaces for children to learn, grow, and play. Immigration enforcement in or around schools not only disrupts the lives of children and their families but also harms the institutions that support social cohesion and community stability. Children from immigrant, mixed-status, and other historically marginalized communities experience these effects disproportionately.1

Decades of research show that family separation causes lasting harm to individual children and to the community at large.2 For children, these experiences are linked to increased anxiety, depression, and trauma. These effects can persist into adulthood and interfere with educational attainment, social relationships, and long-term well-being.3

Immigration enforcement policies that ignore these well-documented consequences stand in direct contradiction to the overwhelming body of scientific evidence on child development. Further, these policies jeopardize the safety, stability, and developmental trajectories of the one in four U.S. children who live with at least one foreign-born parent.4

SRCD has taken concrete steps to ensure this evidence reaches decisionmakers, including:

- Circulating Child Policy Briefs in response to deportation activities (see "Refugees, Deportation, and Unaccompanied Immigrant Children" & "Immigration, Migration, and Refugees").
- Submitting evidence-based responses to federal agencies, highlighting chilling effects of these immigration enforcement policies and their impacts on U.S. citizen children in mixed-status families (e.g., HHS PRWORA Reinterpretation; DHS's Public Charge Rule).
- Supporting our coalition partners through amicus briefs on family separation and unaccompanied children facing immigration procedures.

As we continue to engage with lawmakers and other stakeholders, we want impacted families—particularly Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous, and other communities of color—and our diverse membership to know that SRCD stands with you, and with the overwhelming body of scientific evidence supporting the protection of children from harm.

1 Kirksey, J. J., & Sattin-Bajaj, C. (2021). Immigration arrests and educational impacts: Linking ICE arrests to declines in achievement, attendance, and school climate and safety in California. AERA Open. https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584211039787

2 Society for Research in Child Development. (2024). Immigration, migration, and refugees. https://www.srcd.org/child-policy-hub/child-policy-briefs/immigration-refugees-and-war/immigrationmigration-and-refugees.

3 Society for Research in Child Development. (2022). Refugees, deportation, and unaccompanied immigrant children. https://www.srcd.org/child-policy-hub/child-policy-briefs/immigrationrefugees-and-war/refugees-deportation-and-unaccompanied-immigrant-children

4 Children's Rights. (2025). 2025 immigrant children in the U.S. fact sheet. https://e1.nmcdn.io/assets/crsite/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/2025-Immigrant-Children-in-the-U.S.-Fact-Sheet.pdf