

# The Epoch Times

## Raids Traumatizing Immigrant Children

Jun 18, 2008

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**MISSING HIS MOTHER:** Four-year-old Mike holds a picture of himself with his mother who was deported to Honduras. He is carried by a friend of his mother's who now holds custody. (El Tiempo Latino)

WASHINGTON, D.C.—A recent congressional hearing discussed the trauma imposed on children of undocumented immigrants carried out in workplaces and neighborhoods. The raids are carried out by the Immigration and Custom Enforcement Agency (ICE).

Kathryn Gibney, principal of San Pedro Elementary School in California, testified on May 20 that ICE officials stormed into neighborhood apartment buildings to serve warrants to those who had prior deportation orders. She said that they used the opportunity to "sweep" the entire building, ordering other residents to provide proof of legal residency.

"They shined bright flashlights in the faces of young children who were still asleep. They handcuffed parents in front of their children and took them away, threatening that they would soon be back for others. They left behind them a trail of fear," according to Gibney's written testimony.

Ms. Gibney learned what happened at school from children who were terrified of what may happen to them or their families.

"Throughout the day, muted and trembling voices asked teachers if agents would come to school and take them away, what would happen to their mommy or daddy or aunt or uncle, and what would happen to them," she said.

She also noted that a number of children, who were U.S. citizens, were affected. Even when fully documented parents proved that they were in the U.S. legally, the children were still haunted by the memory. According to testimony from Simon Romo, Chief Counsel of New Mexico's Children, Youth and Family Services Department (CYFD), the child protection agency is often uninformed of the ICE raids, and therefore not well prepared to deal with their consequences for the children.

"Children of immigrants are at high risk for entering the child welfare system," according to the testimony of Romo. However, Romo has not been able to track the number of children in the system as a result of their parents being deported.

Romo added that disruption of a child's home environment and separation from their caregivers can cause severe and permanent damage to a child that could later affect "relational, behavioral, and educational outcomes."

"The times when children are most vulnerable to experiencing trauma as a result of immigration enforcement operations are those when a parent goes to the store and never comes back, or when parents are taken away from their home."

According to *Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America's Children*, a 2007 report by National Council of La Raza (NCLR) and the Urban Institute, even U.S. citizens' children can feel the impact of deportation. This report found 4.9 million children living with at least one undocumented adult, with 64 percent of these being U.S. citizens mostly under the age of 10.

Last month, Washington, DC-based *El Tiempo Latino* carried a front-page story about a 4-year-old boy whose mother, after spending four months in detention, was deported to Honduras. The young child remembered heading to McDonalds with his mother in Woodbridge, Virginia, when men in uniform put her in handcuffs. The child, a U.S. citizen, is currently being cared for by a friend but he is very sad that his mother has been gone for over seven months.

The article notes that the mother, who wishes to bring her son to Honduras, does not have money for his airline ticket.

When asked about handling deportation cases of parents of U.S. citizens, ICE spokesperson Pat Reily told the *Epoch Times*, "What do you do if you are law enforcement; allow everyone with a child to stay in the country? We apply the law to everyone whether they have a child or not."

She added that a parent being deported could bring their children with them. However, the cost of the flight would be the parent's responsibility.

Janet Murguía, President & CEO of NCLR—the largest national Hispanic civil rights organization in the country—stated in her testimony, that although ICE has made some humanitarian improvements, it still has a long way to go.

Murguía pointed out a 1996 raid in New Bedford, M.A. where an eight-month-old nursing infant became dehydrated when his mother was detained. Later, ICE released a memorandum outlining prosecutorial discretion in regard to arrests and detention of nursing mothers in November 2007, setting better guidelines. However, Murguía claimed that there are still cases of infants being separated from their nursing mothers.

She complained that ICE's guidelines are nonbonding, inconsistent and limited in scope.

"Even if ICE were to execute all of its existing policy guidance perfectly and expand its scope to include all children who were affected by immigration raids, there would still be a profound dissonance between the goal of enforcing our nation's immigration laws and the equally important goal of protecting America's children..."

Murguía pointed out that she believes immigration laws should be enforced but humanely. "As with any set of laws, the nation should enforce them wisely and well."

Murguía said that the nation will always deal with undocumented immigrants until the laws become more fair and just. "The longer that our immigration system remains broken and unaddressed by Congress, the longer that these and related problems, and the tensions surrounding immigration itself, will continue.