



**NEW JERSEY**  
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

**September 2018**

### **NJPA Public Statement**

Consistent with the NJPA mission to advance psychology “as a means of promoting health and human welfare,” the approved mission of the NJPA Emergency Action Group is to coordinate a response by NJPA to address the mental health needs of refugees, immigrants, asylum seekers, and detainees. Migrant children and families experience a host of risk factors that often induce and/or exacerbate mental health problems. These include exposure to violence in their countries of origin, dangerous conditions during their migration to the US, as well as physical and sexual abuse by law enforcement and immigration officials (Speri, 2018). Family separation can lead to depression and anxiety among children (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011) and symptoms of trauma (Rojas-Flores, Clements, Hwang, & London, (2017) such as withdrawal, fear, and crying spells (Chaundry, 2011). Depression and anxiety are also observed in adults separated from their children or loved ones (Chaundry, 2011). The experience of family separation can lead to additional risk factors such as economic instability, employment and housing issues, and food insecurity (Dreby, 2012). Moreover, detainment of children and families poses additional problems relating to mental and physical health (Greeley, Guillot-Wright, Kovic, Raphael, Serag, & Smith, 2016). These potentially traumatic events can have cumulative effects on children that lead to more complex psychopathology (Putnam, Harris, & Putnam, 2013). Traumatic events experienced by migrants negatively impacts immediate and extended families, the communities in which they live, the people with whom they work, and the schools children attend. NJPA is well situated to collaborate with other professionals at the individual and systems level, to address the complex mental health needs of this vulnerable population.

While much of the attention has focused on the southern border of the United States, New Jersey has six detention centers, according to ICE (<https://www.ice.gov/detention-facilities>). In addition, [recent news reports](#) indicate that at least some children, who have been separated from their parents, have been brought to New Jersey for placement. Finally, the [American Immigration Council](#) reports that immigrants represent 22% of the NJ population (over half of whom are naturalized), while undocumented immigrants account for 5.4% of the state’s population. One in eleven children (180,580) in NJ are residing with at least one undocumented family member. The American Immigration Council further reports that “immigrants are vital members of New Jersey’s labor force, accounting for a third of workers in multiple industries.” In addition, they “contributed billions of dollars in taxes” and “add tens of billions of dollars to New Jersey’s economy.” They also “account for a third of all self-employed business owners in New Jersey.” Immigrant children, including those who are undocumented, attend our schools, including our colleges and universities. Consequently, the impact of the current crisis in New Jersey is enormous and can have social and economic ripple effects throughout the state.

Therefore, the NJPA Executive Board voted to endorse the recently issued "[Statement of APA President](#) Regarding Administration's Proposal to Detain Child Migrants Longer Than Legally Allowed."