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**Heller, Senators Introduce Legislation to Keep Families Together, Ensure The Integrity of Immigration Laws**

*Bill Follows Heller’s Push to Attorney General Sessions to Stop Separating Families Until Congress Can Pass Solution*

**WASHINGTON –** U.S. Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) today joined U.S. Senators Thom Tillis (R-NC), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Ron Johnson (R-WI), Tom Cotton (R-AR), John Cornyn (R-TX), and Ted Cruz (R-TX) in introducing the Keep Families Together and Enforce the Law Act, which keeps families together while ensuring the integrity of our nation’s immigration laws. The legislation comes one day after Heller [urged the Justice Department to stop the practice of separating families who have illegally crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally until Congress can pass a solution](https://www.heller.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/pressreleases?ID=808E1773-C4C4-4ACF-BA7D-61F7791AA73C).

The Keep Families Together and Enforce the Law Act requires that children and their parents remain together during their legal proceedings. It also includes provisions to ensure the humane and fair treatment of migrant children and families by setting mandatory standards of care for family residential centers. Families will be ensured access to suitable living accommodations, food and water, medical assistance, and any other service necessary for their care.

“Nobody wants to see children separated from their families, period. That’s why I joined several of my colleagues in urging Attorney General Jeff Sessions to stop the practice of dividing families who have illegally crossed the border until Congress can pass legislation to keep families together,” **said Senator Dean Heller.** “The Keep Families Together and Enforce the Law Act is that legislation, and I was proud to help introduce it.”

In addition to keeping children and their parents together, the legislation also keeps children safe by requiring children to be removed from an individual who presents a clear and present danger to the health and safety of the child, including: situations in which DHS cannot verify an individual is the parent of the child; a parent with a violent history of committing aggravated felonies; a child who is a victim of sexual or domestic abuse; a child who is a victim of trafficking.

To prioritize the timely adjudication of family cases, the legislation authorizes 225 new immigration judges and requires the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Attorney General to prioritize resolving the cases of children and families in family residential centers.

Unlike other proposals – which incentivize illegal immigration by codifying “catch and release” policies into law – this legislation actually solves the problem by keeping families together while also ensuring the integrity of our immigration laws.

“Migrant children should not be separated from their families, and both sides of the aisle can agree that we must quickly and permanently address this problem. Our legislation provides the solution by clarifying federal law to ensure that families will remain together and receive good care as they go through the legal process,” **said Senator Thom Tillis.** “I look forward to working with my colleagues in the coming days and codifying this fair and commonsense solution into law.”

“It is cruel to separate families. But it is also cruel and irresponsible to return to a policy that encourages parents to bring their children on a dangerous journey,” **said Senator Marco Rubio.** “This bill will allow us to change the law so that families will remain together while awaiting prioritized proceedings. We should pass it immediately and reunite families.”

“I very much support this solution to a difficult problem,” **said Senator Lindsey Graham.** “Simply put, my goal is to make sure families are not separated, but prevent the rampant abuse of ‘catch and release’ where people are being released who never show up for their hearings. This bill prevents breakup for families, but requires adults to show up. This is the winning combination.”

“This bill would protect children and ensure that families are not separated while their cases are being adjudicated in court, and would end the policy of catch and release of families at the border,” **said Senator Ron Johnson.** “We must stop incentivizing people to come to this country illegally. I hope that my Democrat colleagues in the Senate will work with us to advance this bill into law.”

“This legislation would keep families together while their immigration status is determined instead of simply releasing illegal immigrants into our country,” **said Senator Tom Cotton.** “This is a very difficult situation, but our bill provides a simple solution, one that will both stop the separation of families and enforce our laws.”

“Treating these families with compassion by allowing them to remain together and enforcing the laws on our books don’t have to be mutually exclusive,” **said Senator John Cornyn.** “This legislation allows children to stay with their parents while they await their court proceedings in a separate, safe facility. The Keep Families Together and Enforce the Law Act is a solution everyone can get behind, and I urge Democrats to join our efforts so we can end this crisis quickly.”

“The crisis occurring on the border is one we’ve witnessed for far too long,” **said** **Senator Ted Cruz.** “Children have been the greatest victims of our broken immigration system. This must stop. Congress can come together and ensure that children are kept with their parents while they await a hearing. I hope that my Democratic colleagues will join us to end this crisis, enforce the rule of law, and keep families together.”

Original co-sponsors include Chuck Grassley (R-IA), James Lankford (R-OK), Deb Fischer (R-NE), Joni Ernst (R-IA), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Ben Sasse (R-NE), Pat Roberts (R-KS), Steve Daines (R-MT), Johnny Isakson (R-GA), Jeff Flake (R-AZ), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), Jim Inhofe (R-OK), John Thune (R-SD), Bob Corker (R-TN), Mike Crapo (R-ID), John Hoeven (R-ND), John Boozman (R-AR), Rob Portman (R-OH), and Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

"This is a simple, straight-forward solution to a problem we all agree needs fixing,” **said Senator Chuck Grassley.** “It reflects the American people’s humanity and respects the rule of law by permanently ensuring that families can stay together in family residential centers while their cases are pending. This is exactly our purview as members of the legislative branch: make laws to address pressing issues. There is an urgent need to end the crisis, so I look forward to the bill’s rapid consideration."

“We are a nation that believes in the rule of law, the unity of families, and the protection of children; our immigration laws must reflect these values,” **said Senator James Lankford.** This common-sense bill keeps families together as much as possible at the border. Now is also the time to fix our outdated immigration laws to secure the border, address DACA, crack down on human trafficking, and also incentivize the legal immigration process.”

“The targeted legislative proposal we are offering today focuses on immediately fixing this problem and keeping families together,” **said Senator Deb Fischer.** “It would expedite immigration court proceedings in these cases and help keep children safe during the process. This can become law and solve the problem if our colleagues choose to set politics aside – I hope they will.”

“We can, and should, treat children and families in our immigration system with compassion, while enforcing our nation’s immigration laws. Everyone is working hard to keep these families together and find a long-term solution to address our flawed immigration system,” **said Senator Joni Ernst**.

“The act of forcibly separating children from their parents is a clear sign of how broken our immigration system is and contradicts our values as Americans,” **said Senator Jerry Moran.** “Our priority must be the welfare of these children. These separations must end, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation and promptly fix this circumstance.”

“Three things are true,” **said Senator Ben Sasse.** “First, default family separation is cruel – kids belong with their moms and dads whenever possible. Second, our immigration policy is broken – dumb policies are magnets for human traffickers and the unsecure border is a national security risk. Third, Americans don’t use children as political hostages – anyone trying to use this humanitarian crisis for politics should be ashamed. I’ve called on the President to end this new, discretionary policy and I’m committed to working with my colleagues on legislative solutions as well. The Administration can change course today and Congress can pass this legislation today – let’s get this done.”

“Protecting the children coming across our borders must be a priority,” **said Senator Pat Roberts**. “This common sense legislation ensures parents who can prove their relationship to the child are kept together as a family throughout immigration proceedings.”

“Our bill immediately addresses the humanitarian crisis at our border,” **said Senator Steve Daines.** “Families should not be torn apart as they work their way through our legal system.”

“We should not separate children from their parents at the border, and Congress and the administration should work to keep families together whenever possible while enforcing our laws and protecting the border,” **said Senator Johnny Isakson.** “Our porous borders combined with challenging conditions in other parts of the world have caused an influx of immigrants entering the country illegally. The Keep Families Together and Enforce the Law Act would help us confront this influx and improve the processing of immigration cases by adding judges and residential centers while also allowing families to stay together.”

“The issue of family separation at the border demands a legislative solution,” **said Senator Orrin Hatch.** “We cannot continue to separate young children from their parents, but we also cannot continue with misguided, ineffective catch-and-release policies. This legislation provides the solution we need. It keeps families together while cases are processed without tying the hands of law enforcement.”

“I’m proud to support this key legislation that would that would overturn the court case that requires family separation, permanently addressing the root cause of the crisis,” **said Senator Jim Inhofe.** “As we continue to improve our border security and build the wall, this legislation focuses on keeping families together and ensuring they receive proper care.”

“While the issues surrounding our immigration system are complex, we can all agree that innocent children should be protected, and I am hopeful the administration will take executive action to halt the separation of families on our southern border,” **said Senator Bob Corker**. “Congress also must act and provide a longer term solution to the many challenges facing our nation’s immigration system. The Keep Families Together and Enforce the Law Act is an important step in the right direction.”

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