



July 12, 2018

**Testimony of Health Justice, Immigrant Health Advocate, Karina Albistegui Adler**

**On Behalf of New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**

**Before New York City Council, Committee on Immigration**

Good afternoon, my name is Karina Albistegui Adler and I am an Immigrant Health Advocate at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you to Chairperson Carlos Menchaca and the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to present testimony today.

**I. We Are New York Lawyers for the Public Interest**

For over 40 years, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) has been a leading civil rights and legal services advocate for New Yorkers marginalized by race, poverty, disability, and immigration status. NYLPI's Health Justice Program brings a racial justice and immigrant rights focus to health care advocacy in New York City and State. We continue to advocate for, better medical treatment for people held in immigration detention centers, language access in healthcare settings, and health care access for all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status.

**II. Family Separation Further Dehumanizes Immigrants**

The forced separation of children from their parents at our country's border cannot be viewed separate and apart from the deplorable conditions of the jails used to incarcerate immigrants detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"). Much like the punitive

incarceration that many undocumented New Yorkers live and fear every day, the separation of families and the mistreatment of our youngest immigrants is heart wrenching. As you know, many New York City residents are currently detained in ICE detention facilities or jails that contract with ICE. They are not charged with criminal violations but are denied freedom under the guise of ensuring that they attend their administrative hearings. Taking immigrant children from their parents is but another manner of dehumanizing undocumented people living in the country and those seeking asylum. On this continuum we have seen our friends and neighbors labeled “rapists,” “drug dealers,” and “animals.” Their presence has been described as an “infestation.” This hateful rhetoric seeks to normalize the abhorrent conditions that both adults and children face inside these detention centers and the continued denial of vital medical care to people held there.

Through our work we have witnessed how a policy of dehumanizing non-citizens plays out within the walls of the detention facilities in and near New York. The most sobering stories, are of the deaths of immigrants in detention. A June 2018 report by Human Rights Watch, the American Civil Liberties Union, Detention Watch Network, and National Immigrant Justice Center noted that “inadequate medical care contributed to or led to” the death 8 of the 15 people for whom ICE has released “Detainee Death Reviews” in the period between December 2017 and April 2018. We have also documented instances of ICE, and the facilities with which it contracts, denying and delaying critical medical treatment including: adequate care for cancer, medications for diabetes, and emergency surgery for a ruptured eyeball. These are but a few

examples in a long history of ICE's disregard for the humanity and dignity of people in their custody.

We have witnessed firsthand how the physical and psychological effects of immigration detention stay with our clients long after they have been released. We have seen over and over the grave impact that detention and family separation has on our adult clients. It is difficult to imagine the extent of the trauma that has been inflicted on the children who are being shuffled anonymously through the system, far from their parents.

## **II. NYLPI Supports the City Council's Resolution**

History will judge the Administration's separation of families harshly. We are glad to see that our city is taking action against this cruel policy. For these reasons we support the City Council's resolution calling upon the U.S. Congress to pass, and the President to sign, the Keep Families Together Act (S. 3036). We hope that Congress and the President will act swiftly to reunite families who have already been separated. We encourage City Council to continue to take actions to improve the treatment of people in ICE custody and to promote alternatives to civil detention for undocumented people.

Thank you for your time and attention. We look forward to continued collaboration with the City Council to improve the lives of immigrant New Yorkers.