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Child Welfare Systems and Heightened Deportation Efforts

State and Local Agency Experiences

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Disclaimer

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since early 2025, federal immigration deportation efforts have significantly increased. Recent estimates report that the Department of Homeland Security arrested the parents of at least 27,000 children in the first seven months of the second Trump administration (Singh & Craft, 2026). The number has grown since then.

When a parent is removed, children may depart with the parent either by family choice, or in the case of minors living in the U.S. without legal immigration status, through removal. If the children remain in the U.S., they may stay with a parent remaining in the U.S., a relative, or someone else.

In the context of heightened deportation efforts, there have been concerns and questions about how often children may be entering foster care1 after the detention or removal of a parent. However, there has been limited information about children entering care after parental deportation, the circumstances of these cases, and how child welfare jurisdictions may be responding.

To gain insight into recent experiences of child welfare agencies, our team interviewed representatives from thirteen state and local child welfare agencies about what they have been seeing in their work. The central themes from those conversations include:

- The jurisdiction leaders we spoke with were aware of few, if any, children entering foster care directly after the detention or deportation of a parent.
- Jurisdiction leaders varied in whether they were able to report the number or circumstances of children entering the child welfare system after detention or deportation of a parent. Some jurisdictions established a process to ensure information about these cases flowed upward to agency leadership, while others did not.
- None of the jurisdictions reported receiving referrals from Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE's) Enforcement and Removal Operations Division or Customs and Border Protection (CBP).
- Most interviewees said their jurisdictions offer resources and support specifically for child welfare-involved families and unaccompanied minors facing immigration issues. These varied, but included legal assistance, accompaniment, travel coordination, and international home studies.
- Most jurisdiction leaders said that relatives or other trusted adults are likely stepping in to care for children when their parent is detained or deported.
- Some jurisdiction leaders noted that caregivers of children affected by parental detention or deportation may face barriers to accessing public support, including eligibility requirements and fear of providing information to public systems. They also emphasized the importance of assistance provided by trusted community organizations.

[1] In this report, we use the term "foster care" to refer to all out of home care placements in the child welfare system (for example, foster homes, formal kinship care, and congregate care).

The indications that there has not been a large inflow of children to foster care in the last year after parental removal should not be treated as evidence that this will not happen in the future. Some jurisdictions highlighted concerns about whether caregivers will have the support they need to stably care for these children and provide for their wellbeing, longer term.

Our report offers these takeaways:

- Jurisdictions vary in their use of specialized immigration support teams (internal or contracted) and processes for staff to request help on cases with immigration-related issues. Jurisdictions should evaluate their needs in the context of heightened deportations.
- Public agencies and philanthropic organizations should explore opportunities to support nongovernmental organizations serving immigrant communities and families affected by heightened deportation efforts and detention and deportation of parents.
- When child welfare prevention services are available to children impacted by parental detention and deportation and their caregivers, providers should consider whether administrative barriers or fears of engaging with government may limit these families' access to such help.
- Jurisdictions should ensure relevant staff are familiar with ICE's Detained Parents Directive and its provisions relevant to child welfare agencies. ICE should take steps to ensure adherence to the provisions of the Directive.

In this brief, we provide additional background and context, explain the approach, describe principal themes in what we heard from jurisdictions, and propose next steps for child welfare agencies, other public and nonpublic organizations, and communities.

INTRODUCTION

Federal immigration deportation efforts have increased significantly since early 2025. There is reason to believe that 20,000 or more parents of U.S.-born children were removed from the United States during the first year of the second Trump administration, along with additional parents of children who were not U.S.-born. These numbers will grow over time as deportation efforts continue. However, there is only limited information about children's living arrangements or the extent of child welfare involvement after the removal of a parent. This project was initiated to learn about the experiences of child welfare agencies in the context of heightened deportation efforts.

Deportation of Parents

The federal government does not report the number of children who experience the loss of a parent due to deportation. From 2011 to 2020, the federal government released semiannual reports of the number of people removed from the country who stated they were parents of U.S.-born children. During this period, there were significant variations in the numbers reported, with the highest being in 2011-2013, followed by a subsequent decline, and the lowest figure (15,325) being reported in 2020.[2]

Over the period from 2015 to 2020, an average of 12% of people removed stated they were parents of U.S.-born children, with a range of between 10 and 14% each year.[3] This could be an underestimate if people being removed were hesitant to state that they had U.S.-born children. It also does not include parents without any U.S.-born children.

In the first 7 months of 2025, 18,400 persons who were arrested stated that they were parents of minor children.

In the absence of federal reporting on parent removals, journalists have made Freedom of Information Act requests to access DHS I-213 forms (Record of Deportable/Inadmissible Alien), in which arrested individuals state whether they are parents of minor children. This reporting may understate actual numbers if an inquiry is not made or immigrants are afraid to state they are parents of minor children. An analysis by *ProPublica* concluded that in the first 7 months of 2025, 11,000 persons who were detained stated they were parents of U.S.-born children (Rosenberg et al., 2025). A subsequent analysis by *The Guardian*, considering parents of both U.S.-born and non-U.S. born children, concluded that in the first seven months of 2025, 18,400 persons who were arrested stated that they were parents of minor children, affecting between 27,000 and 32,000 children (Singh & Craft, 2026).

[2] The last submitted report is available at https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/ice_-_deportation_of_parents_of_u.s.-born_children_second_half_cy_2020_0.pdf.

[3] Calculations were based on comparing annual DHS reporting on numbers of people removed who stated they were parents of U.S.-born children with annual ICE removal numbers. Annual totals ranged from 10% to 14%% during this period.

Since that analysis covered a 7-month period, the total numbers since the beginning of the second Trump Administration will be higher. *The New York Times* estimated that 230,000 people were removed after interior arrests (arrests not made at the border) in the first year of the Trump administration (Sun, 2026). If 10 to 14% of those removals were of parents, that would suggest in the range of 23,000 to 32,200 removals of parents of U.S.-born children in the first year of the administration, in addition to parents of children who were not U.S.-born. The Migration Policy Institute estimates that 16% of children of unauthorized parents are not U.S. citizens (Gelatt et al., 2025).

A recent analysis published by the Brookings Institution matching immigration and census data produced substantially higher figures, estimating that more than 145,000 U.S. citizen children and around 205,000 children in total have been affected by parental detention (Cancian et al., 2026).

There is additional reason to expect that actual number of removals of parents in the context of heightened deportation may be higher than current estimates. In most prior years, administrations used priorities for enforcement efforts. For example, the Biden administration directed DHS to use prosecutorial discretion and prioritize threats to national security, public safety, and border security (Mayorkas, 2021). The Trump administration eliminated such priorities on January 20, 2025 (Exec. Order No. 14,159, 2025). This had the effect of making all unauthorized persons potentially subject to deportation, including those who had been in the United States for lengthy periods and those with no criminal records.

Federal Policies Concerning Arrests, Detention, and Removal of Parents

Since 2013, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has had an internal directive addressing cases in which ICE interacts with parents or guardians of minor children (Immigrant Legal Resource Center, 2025). The directive, originally known as the "Parental Interests Directive," has gone through several revisions, with the most recent one issued in July 2025. While earlier versions had greater protections for children, parents, and guardians, the current version still has significant features relating to policies at the time of arrest of a parent or guardian; detaining parents in a location close to their children; communication and visitation with children; parents' and guardians' ability to participate in child welfare proceedings; and procedures when planning for removal of a parent (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2025a).

The current version, now referred to as the Detained Parents Directive, has a number of requirements relevant to child welfare agencies. Among them, the Directive provides that when ICE is engaging in an enforcement action, ICE personnel should accommodate a parent or guardian's efforts to make alternative care arrangements for their minor children prior to detention. The directive further provides that if the parent or guardian cannot make an alternative care arrangement for their minor child at the time of arrest, or if there is an indication the child has been subject to abuse or neglect by a parent or other adult who may be asked to take custody of the child, ICE personnel must contact the local child welfare authority or law enforcement agency to take custody of the child.

The Detained Parents Directive has other provisions relevant to child welfare agencies, including that ICE detention facilities should have a Detained Parent Field Point of Contact ("POC"). If a parent or legal guardian in detention has a pending child welfare proceeding, where practicable, the POC must arrange for participation in a family court or child welfare or guardianship proceeding when their appearance is required for them to maintain or regain custody or guardianship of their minor child or children, and ICE has been timely notified. Prior to the removal of a parent or guardian with a pending child welfare or family court proceeding, the POC or their designee must review the status of the proceedings and consider whether the parent or legal guardian needs to communicate with the child welfare agency, court, a guardian ad litem, or their legal representative prior to removal.

Though the ICE Detained Parents Directive remains active, there is limited information about the extent to which ICE is implementing it. However, one recent report, drawing on interviews with deported parents in Honduras and professionals serving them, raises concerns that ICE is not consistently following the core components of the directive (Women's Refugee Commission & Physicians for Human Rights, 2026). Customs and Border Protection (CBP), also within DHS, has also been involved with internal arrests, but does not have a publicly available policy comparable to the Detained Parents Directive.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, receives children apprehended at the border who arrive without a parent or guardian or one able to care for them. These children remain in ORR custody until they are released to a parent or other sponsor, attain legal status, are removed, or turn 18. Historically, ORR rarely received children referred as a result of internal immigration enforcement. However, as a statutory matter, ORR is required to receive unaccompanied children referred by federal agencies with custody of those children, whether at the border or through internal arrest (8 U.S.C. 1232(b)(3)). Recent reporting states that ICE referred about 600 children to ORR facilities in 2025, including 160 for child welfare concerns.[4] Since these are not referrals to a child welfare agency, they are not reflected in Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data, discussed in more detail below.

Living and Care Arrangements of Children after Removal of a Parent

When a parent is deported, the federal government does not track what happens to their child or children. There are a number of possibilities—children may leave the U.S. with their parent, either by family choice or, if children lack legal status, by removal; they may remain in the U.S. with another parent; or they may remain in the U.S. with a relative, family friend, or in some other arrangement. The available research on children's circumstances after removal of a parent is relatively limited and small-scale.[5] One national analysis found that increases in immigration enforcement from 2005 to 2015 were associated with an increase in children

[4] From Rosenberg et al. (2025), "child welfare concerns" in these data include: "instances of kids who were encountered alone inside the country or were considered potential victims of domestic abuse or trafficking, or instances where minors or the adults they were with had been accused of committing a crime."

[5] A research synthesis developed for HHS and published in 2015 stated: "The little research that has been conducted about how children are affected by parental deportation consists of small-scale studies of the impact of workplace raids in specific communities. The studies have found that in most cases, fathers are arrested, leaving behind mothers who often have little or no attachment to the labor force" (Capps et al., 2015).

living with naturalized relatives or friends (Amuedo-Durantes & Arenas-Arroyo, 2019). Though relevant, the study may not reflect recent developments and experiences.

Immigrant-serving organizations have placed major emphasis on the importance of developing "safety plans" to address contingencies if a parent is deported, including directing the care of their child or children. These plans are not always formal, though many states do have standby guardianship laws that can apply to a range of circumstances where a parent is absent or incapacitated. These laws may include providing for a nonparent to be able to exercise some or all responsibilities for a parent if the parent is no longer in the United States.[6]

When any children—including children of immigrants—come to the attention of the child welfare system, placement in foster care should be a last resort.

It is broadly recognized that when any children—including children of immigrants—come to the attention of the child welfare system, placement in foster care should be a last resort when parents and alternative caregivers are unavailable or cannot protect children from harm. Prior research has found that children of immigrants are not overrepresented in foster care; in fact, there are indications of underrepresentation (Dettlaff & Johnson, 2011; Putnam-Hornstein et al., 2013; for a discussion of factors contributing to underrepresentation, see Detlaff & Earner, 2012). Studies have also highlighted the distinctive needs of child-welfare-involved families with immigrant members, including a need for culturally relevant services, interpretation or translation services, and immigration-specific legal aid. Special attention is warranted to ensure detained and deported parents in particular can take part in permanency planning, visitation, and when appropriate, reunification (Greenberg et al., 2019; Lovato & Sepp, 2025).

States are required to report to the federal government data elements relating to the child welfare system through AFCARS. In AFCARS reporting for 2025, states reported a total of 232 cases in which detention or deportation of a parent was a circumstance at the time of foster care entry. This represents a small fraction of the 175,008 children who entered foster care that year, and as one comparison, 12,675 were reported as having incarceration of a parent as a circumstance at time of entry. However, these may be undercounts, as jurisdictions have only been required to report parental immigration detainment or deportation as a circumstance at entry since 2023.

[6] For an overview of guardianship as an option for unauthorized parents, see Rafieifar, 2025.

OUR APPROACH

Our team undertook this project to better understand the experiences of child welfare agencies in the context of heightened deportation efforts. We began by holding exploratory conversations with national experts in the areas of child welfare and immigration. In these conversations, we asked for advice on our approach to the work, input on our discussion questions, and suggestions on which jurisdictions might be willing to participate.

We then reached out to child welfare jurisdictional leaders, a number of whom were recommended by external partners or Chapin Hall staff. We provided jurisdictional leaders with information about the project and invited them to participate, along with any additional jurisdictional staff they felt should join the conversation. Given the potential sensitivity of the topic, we also let jurisdictions know that they would not be identified in any reporting without their express permission.

Ultimately, we spoke with leaders from thirteen child welfare jurisdictions between October 2025 and May 2026. These included five county or city jurisdictions and eight states, with child welfare populations ranging from hundreds to thousands. We interviewed leaders from both majority-Democratic and majority-Republican states across the U.S. Several of the jurisdictions we talked to had faced particularly high levels of immigration arrests. We spoke with jurisdictional staff in a range of leadership roles, including directors, general counsels, regional or program managers, and staff with specific immigration-related responsibilities.

WHAT WE HEARD

The themes that we highlight in this section draw from verbatim meeting notes and reflect the information provided by jurisdictional leaders we talked with. These themes are not generalizable to other jurisdictions, though we have greater confidence in themes which were consistent across interviews.

Foster Care after Detention or Deportation of a Parent

The jurisdiction leaders we spoke with were aware of few, if any, children entering foster care at the time of arrest or removal of a parent. Some said they were not aware of any children entering foster care directly following detention or deportation of a parent since the beginning of 2025. Those that knew of any cases reported very low numbers: always fewer than 10, usually fewer than 5.

Jurisdiction leaders described a larger number of cases where there was *any* involvement with immigration detention or deportation. These included situations where:

- a family that was already involved in the child welfare system was affected by parental detention or deportation;
- a child was living with a relative or other caregiver following the detention or deportation of a parent, and the caregiver was no longer able to care for the child or a reporter called the hotline with concerns about circumstances in the home; or
- unaccompanied undocumented children, who may or may not have previously been in ORR custody, were referred to the child welfare agency.

For example, one jurisdiction leader described:

We have situations where family arrangements are made [for care of a child whose parent has been detained or deported], and down the road the family arrangement is disrupted. We find out at that point and may become aware that the parent was deported.

A leader from another jurisdiction was aware of a situation in which a school contacted the agency about a student staying with the school principal. The student had a prior informal care arrangement following the deportation of a parent, but that arrangement fell through. Another explained, "I can't say that we've had any significant number at all where the reason [for the child welfare involvement] is the parent is deported."

When jurisdiction leaders could tell us sources of referrals for these cases, schools came up the most, which mirrors trends in child abuse or neglect reporting generally. Across jurisdictions, we heard about a handful of reports from health care providers and social workers. In one jurisdiction where local law enforcement was cooperating with ICE, interviewees said that they were getting a small number of referrals from local law enforcement at the time of the parents' detention.

Information on Children Entering Foster Care after Parental Detention or Deportation

Jurisdiction leaders varied in their ability to report the number or circumstances of children entering foster care after detention or deportation of a parent. Some jurisdictions established a process to ensure information about these cases flowed upward to agency leadership, while others did not. Some jurisdictions required hotline staff or caseworkers to elevate all cases involving detention or deportation of a parent to jurisdictional leadership. Leaders from these jurisdictions explained that they felt that elevating cases allowed them to offer more tailored support to these families. One stated: "[Our] approach, it's very individualized and thoughtful. . . . This is not a one size fits all approach." Some also noted that they were able to develop resources, policies, and FAQs based on insights from these cases. These jurisdiction leaders had more detailed information about cases and were more confident in their assessment of how many had come in.

Interviewees from jurisdictions that did not require these cases to be flagged with leadership generally had more limited information. A few referred to the number of cases in AFCARS reporting with "parental immigration detainment or deportation" recorded as a circumstance at entry into foster care. However, these jurisdiction leaders did not have additional information about these cases at the time of the interview.

Child Welfare Agency Contact with ICE

None of the jurisdiction leaders reported receiving referrals from ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations Division or Customs and Border Protection. In roughly half of the interviews, jurisdiction leaders said they were not previously aware of the Detained Parents Directive, and none reported receiving any referrals from ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations.[7] CBP does not have a policy directive similar to the Detained Parents Directive, and none of the jurisdiction leaders reported having received any referrals from CBP.

Many jurisdiction leaders observed it is harder to reach parents in immigration detention now than in the past, because detainees are being moved out of state and removed quickly.

Most of the jurisdiction leaders we talked with were aware of staff attempting to contact child-welfare-involved parents in immigration detention to determine the parent's intent for the care of their child, facilitate visitation, or coordinate court appearance. Five jurisdictions reported having some success in locating and communicating with detained parents. However, many jurisdiction leaders observed it is harder to reach parents in immigration detention now than in the past, because detainees are being moved out of state and removed quickly. One interviewee shared her team's experiences: "We have legal staff who try to serve [detained parents], but parents don't show up for hearings, they literally—they're on an island. . . . ICE doesn't talk to us."

[7] One jurisdiction did note that it sometimes receives referrals from Homeland Security Investigations, a part of ICE responsible for human trafficking investigations, and distinct from ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations .

In four jurisdictions, interviewees were aware of an ICE Point of Contact, and two of them had heard of jurisdiction staff successfully contacting one. Leaders from those two jurisdictions explained that they have contact with a national Department of Homeland Security office focused on detained parents. In both cases, those relationships were established prior to 2025 and continued uninterrupted. These leaders reported that they were able to reach out to this DHS office for help locating detained parents and connecting with ICE Points of Contact at specific detention centers.

Immigration-related Support in the Child Welfare System

Most jurisdictions said they offer resources and support specifically for child-welfare-involved families and unaccompanied minors facing immigration issues, including legal assistance, accompaniment, travel coordination, and international home studies. Some said they work with outside partners and contractors, including consulates, to provide these supports.

Some jurisdictions reported having an internal team or designated staff focused on supporting children and families with immigration issues who are involved in child welfare. Some agencies with no in-house immigration-focused legal expertise contracted with outside immigration attorneys or referred to community-based legal aid services. Jurisdictions described these as ongoing efforts, not something new or a response to increased immigration enforcement.

When families are already involved in child welfare and a parent is deported, jurisdictions generally reported attempting to document parents' wishes for care of their child (and in some cases, the child's wishes), assess the safety of different placement options, and coordinate travel or care arrangements based on those factors. But broadly, jurisdiction leaders indicated their response is very case-by-case. One interviewee outlined their jurisdiction's process: "We try to find a way to work a case plan, to get a hold of a parent or family member, even in a country of origin. We do family finding, ask the parent and kid: 'Who is your family? Who could you talk to?'" Several interviewees reported that their jurisdiction works with outside entities (like International Social Service—USA and consular offices) when assessing permanency options outside of the U.S. or coordinating international travel for a child in state care.

Care Arrangements After Detention or Deportation of a Parent

Most jurisdiction leaders expressed the view that relatives or other trusted adults are likely stepping in to care for children when their parent is detained or deported. However, none had concrete information about the scale of this community response or the nature of these relationships. For example, an interviewee from one jurisdiction that wasn't seeing any cases reflected, "[It] may be because agencies are distributing Know Your Rights flyers, maybe kids are safely with relatives, maybe the number of detained parents is lower than we expect. But it seems like children are being safely supervised."

In most of the jurisdictions from which we interviewed staff, at least some of these caregiving relationships could be formalized through standby guardian or other caregiving authority arrangements. One jurisdiction leader emphasized the importance of establishing guardianship: "Absent abuse or neglect, parents direct the care of their children. . . . That's why we focus so much on standby guardianship. Even if someone doesn't see it as a legal proof of guardianship, it demonstrates parents' intent." However, interviewees noted that the requirements to establish these formal arrangements, which vary by state, can be a barrier.

While families are often fearful of contact with the child welfare system, some jurisdiction leaders emphasized that heightened detention and deportation has contributed to the immigrant community becoming more fearful of public systems. One leader emphasized that their jurisdiction "will serve any child, regardless of immigration status." But they also explained, "What I'm hearing from community is [that] people are associating us with the federal government and are scared to call." Several interviewees noted that advocacy groups have been working with parents at risk of deportation to make advance plans for the care of their children, in part to avoid the possibility of a need for child welfare involvement.

Access to Public and Community Services

Most jurisdiction leaders discussed pathways for kinship caregivers and children affected by parental deportation to receive public services. Some said that caregivers could elect to become formal kinship caregivers, which would come with child welfare services and support. Some also described administering or funding voluntary prevention services programs like warmlines, kinship navigation, and community-based service networks, which were broadly low-barrier and available to families impacted by parental detention or deportation. One jurisdiction leader explained that, despite restrictions on the use of federal funds, they were able to use other funding sources to serve all families: "There's no difference in any family on what they can get—daycare, food, emergency cash assistance. Nothing different. If they have children, they can get help from [agency] prevention services." Some jurisdiction leaders noted that these children and, in some cases, their caregivers may be able to get public assistance (for example, Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program [KinGAP], Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF], or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]) if they meet program eligibility requirements.

Although these public supports and prevention programs are available to at least some families impacted by parental detention and deportation, many jurisdiction leaders emphasized the unique barriers children and caregivers may face to getting help. Not all jurisdictions had policies allowing undocumented individuals to be formal kinship caregivers. Many public benefits programs restrict eligibility based on the child's citizenship or immigration status and the formality of the caregiving arrangement.

But even when children or families are eligible, they may face other barriers to accessing services. For example, a number of jurisdiction leaders suggested parents or caregivers may be hesitant to seek help from any programs associated with public systems, especially if they must submit personal information. One jurisdiction leader explained, "People with insufficent documentation are also fearful of government involvement. For example, an uncle may be happy to take care of his niece, but doesn't want to be fingerprinted [to be a formal kin caregiver]." Two jurisdiction leaders reported a recent drop in the number of participants in their agencies' support programs, particularly ones involving in-home services. One described, "We are hearing that families may want the help [from our home visiting program] but are concerned about engaging because of an undocumented person in the home."

Jurisdictions broadly indicated that they believed community-based services were key resources for caregivers of children impacted by parental detention or deportation. They also emphasized that these community-based services may be more trusted and accessible than government services. Some jurisdictions specifically highlighted the important work of organizations serving immigrant families, including offering legal services and helping families prepare emergency plans.

DISCUSSION AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Low foster care entry rates don't mean low need. Children affected by parental detention or deportation may be in informal care arrangements that could become unstable over time, and the caregivers holding those arrangements together may be too fearful of public systems to ask for help.

We undertook this project to gain insight into whether and how heightened detention and deportation—which is increasingly affecting parents—was impacting the work of child welfare systems. We also hoped to learn whether child welfare agencies had any contact with ICE about referrals into child welfare, visitation, or court appearance, per the guidance laid out in ICE's Detained Parent Directive.

None of the jurisdictions we talked to were aware of a significant increase in children entering foster care following the detention or deportation of a parent, and some weren't aware of any cases. These jurisdictions were not aware of receiving any referrals directly from ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations. These themes align with other recent reporting on parental detention and deportation (Ernsthausen et al., 2026; Llanos, 2026; Women's Refugee Commission & Physicians for Human Rights, 2026).

Most jurisdictions weren't aware of or had not successfully reached an ICE Point of Contact. Several jurisdictions reported their staff struggled to communicate with detained and deported parents of children in child welfare. However, a few jurisdictions reported having pre-existing relationships with a national DHS team focused on parental rights, which facilitated connection to ICE POCs and parents in detention centers. ICE's website indicates that jurisdictions may be able to request similar assistance in locating detained parents through the ICE Office of Enforcement and Removal Operations Contact form, by selecting "parental interest" as the type of inquiry, issue, or concern (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2025b).

The indications that there has not been a large inflow of children into foster care in the last year after parental removal should not be treated as evidence that these children and their caregivers are not in need of support. Representatives of several jurisdictions highlighted concerns about what may happen over time to children in potentially unstable circumstances and lacking public supports.

Key Takeaways

Based on what we heard from this group of child welfare jurisdictions and what we know from prior research, we present some key takeaways for public systems and funders:

- Jurisdictions vary in their use of specialized immigration support teams (internal or contracted) and processes for staff to request help on cases with immigration-related issues. Jurisdictions should evaluate their needs in the context of heightened deportations.
- Public agencies and philanthropic organizations should explore opportunities to support nongovernmental organizations serving families with immigrant members in need of assistance as a result of heightened deportation efforts and after detention and deportation of parents.
- When child welfare prevention services are available to children impacted by parental detention and deportation and their caregivers, providers should consider whether administrative barriers or fears of engaging with government may limit these families' access to such help.
- Jurisdictions should ensure relevant staff are familiar with the requirements of the Detained Parents Directive and ICE should take steps to ensure adherence to those requirements.

There are a number of important questions about the nature, extent, and sufficiency of community and system supports for children affected by parental detention and deportation and their caregivers. This project was descriptive and exploratory, with a fairly narrow focus. We encourage a deeper dive into how child welfare and other public systems can best support these children and their families and promote permanency along the continuum of child welfare services and voluntary prevention programs.

We also heard from jurisdictions that relatives and other community members are likely stepping up to care for some children impacted by parental detention or deportation. They felt that use of community-based organizations may be the main pathway for support for children and caregivers outside of the child welfare system. It would be valuable to better understand how community organizations and groups are mobilizing to support these families and what they need from public systems and philanthropic organizations to be successful in their work.

Finally, there have been varying versions of the Detained Parents Directive across multiple administrations, and all prior versions provided greater protections than this one. But even in its current form, the Directive has the potential to provide important protections for parents and children in the context of deportation. It will be valuable for child welfare agencies to be fully aware of the Directive and for ICE to ensure adherence to it.

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