

BET TZEDEK'S RAPID RESPONSE PROJECT: PROTECTING CHILDREN OF DEPORTED PARENTS



On February 21, 2017, the Trump Administration issued new immigration enforcement guidelines authorizing the expedited deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants previously deemed low priorities for removal. Although we do not yet know how aggressive and sweeping the enforcement of this policy will be, we do know this: those who will be most deeply affected by it are children.

A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE MAKING

The Red Cross estimates that there are 250,000 U.S. citizen children of undocumented parents living in Los Angeles County. They have the same rights as all Americans, and the same basic needs as all children: safety, stability, and the security of their parents' care. But they now live daily with the credible threat that their parents may be taken away.

If mass deportations are enacted on anything close to the scale advocates fear, thousands of children will be left without parents—creating an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

IMPACTS OF PARENTAL DEPORTATION

As when a child is separated suddenly from their parents due to parental illness, incarceration, or death, children whose parents are deported may experience serious psychological trauma. Witnessing their home invaded and mother or father arrested—or coming home to find them gone—is terrifying. In an instant, the fundamental certainties of the child's world vanish, leaving them left to worry: who will take care of them, will they see their parents again, and will they, too, be taken away.

When one parent is deported, the remaining parent often becomes depressed, while children experience anger, anxiety, behavioral problems and trouble in school. Usually living at or near the poverty level to begin with, families often face severe economic hardship, leading to housing instability and food insecurity. One study found family income dropped 70% after a parent's deportation. Although some public benefits are available to undocumented children and other immigrants, many parents will not seek assistance because they fear interacting with the government. The outcomes are direst when both parents are deported. Depending on the circumstances, the Department of Children and Family Services may consider the children abandoned and place them in foster care.

BET TZEDEK'S RESPONSE

Parents need legal help to ensure their children's care and safety in the event they are detained. Unfortunately, there is widespread misinformation about what legal documents parents should file; and unscrupulous attorneys and notaries are charging many for unnecessary services that will not help.

Bet Tzedek has extensive expertise in the relevant law, and is committed to help parents plan for their children's care and custody in their absence. Our attorneys and trained pro bono volunteers provide:

- **Know-Your-Rights Trainings** to prepare parents for the possibility of being questioned or detained, and inform them what they can do now to ensure their children's care and custody.

- **Emergency Preparedness Toolkit**, in English and Spanish, with detailed guidance for parents on how to talk to their kids and choose a legal guardian, and answers to FAQs.
- **Comprehensive Legal Services** for parents, including but not limited to: legal guardianships, conservatorships, as well as real estate, and tax assistance.
- **Public Benefits Access** assistance for guardians and parents to access benefits including food, housing, healthcare, income supports, and educational and mental health services for children.

WHY BET TZEDEK?

Bet Tzedek is uniquely qualified and positioned to meet this community need—with unparalleled expertise in guardianship law and a strong history of advocating for undocumented families.

Guardianship Expertise: Bet Tzedek’s expertise in Guardianship Law is one reason the Red Cross and other community partners looked to us as a first responder in the crisis of parental deportations. For 15 years, Bet Tzedek’s Kinship Care program has ensured the stability and wellbeing of children whose parents are unable or unwilling to raise them. We provide legal advice, representation, and advocacy to grandparents and other relative-caregivers to help them secure legal guardianships, healthcare, public benefits and special educational services for the children in their care.

History of Advocacy for the Undocumented: Bet Tzedek makes the conscious decision not to accept funding from the federal Legal Services Corporation, the nation’s largest legal aid funder, because recipients cannot serve undocumented individuals. Throughout our programs, we provide culturally and linguistically competent services to all, regardless of immigration status. We are known and trusted among undocumented and mixed-status families primarily through two programs:

Employment Rights Project (ERP): Launched in 2001, Bet Tzedek’s ERP provides legal services and outreach to low-wage workers and trafficked laborers, most of whom are undocumented. We are the only legal provider in Los Angeles serving these workers, whose status makes them particularly vulnerable to employer abuses like wage theft, denial of meal breaks, sexual assault and unlawful termination. Bet Tzedek has helped over 5,400 workers in the restaurant, garment and other industries through individual and class actions, obtaining over \$36 million for workers. *Many of our clients are parents now at heightened risk for deportation.*

Immigrant Child Advocacy Project: Since 2010, Bet Tzedek has provided free legal services to unaccompanied undocumented minors (UUMs) seeking refuge in the U.S. after fleeing horrific violence and abuse in other countries. Our staff recruit, train and mentor pro bono volunteers across California to provide free legal representation to UUMs and their sponsors, helping them navigate complex paperwork and state court proceedings to secure legal guardianships and qualify for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status—enabling remain permanently in the U.S.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Volunteer: We cannot do this alone. We need attorneys and translators. After being trained by Bet Tzedek attorneys, volunteers will sit down with families to provide brief advice and counsel and draft planning documents designed to ensure parents’ care wishes are respected by a court. To volunteer, please complete this [form](#) or contact Diego Cartegena, Vice President, Pro Bono, at dcartegena@bettzedek.org or (323) 549-5839

Donate: This project must be funded entirely through private sector contributions. Costs include court fees, outreach materials, attorney training, and staff salaries. To donate, please click [here](#) or contact Allison Lee, Vice President, External Affairs at (323) 549-5813 or alee@bettzedek.org.