



# Durbin calls on DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen to step down in wake of failure to reunite "deleted" families

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WASHINGTON — During a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the Trump Administration's incompetent family reunification efforts, U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today called on U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, the architect of this humanitarian disaster, to resign.

**“Incredibly, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen claimed, ‘We do not have a policy of separating families at the border. Period.’ But it was on her watch and under her leadership that nearly 2,700 children were separated from their parents, and more than 700 children still have not been reunited with their families – including more than 400 whose parents were apparently deported and more than 90 whose parents can’t be located at all,” Durbin said. “What will become of these children and their parents, who border agents called, ‘deleted family units’? In the name of these ‘deleted family units,’ 711 ‘lost children,’ and common decency, I am today calling on the architect of this humanitarian disaster, Department of Homeland Security Secretary Nielsen, to step down.”**

Durbin also called on the Senate Judiciary Committee to pass Senator Dianne Feinstein's (D-CA) *Keep Families Together Act*, which prohibits family separation; pass Senator Mazie Hirono's (D-HI) *Fair Day in Court for Kids Act*, which provides unaccompanied children with legal representation in deportation proceedings; and pass Durbin's *Humane Treatment of Migrant Children Act*, which requires ICE to prioritize the detention of those who pose a threat to national security or public safety, increases funding for Alternatives to Detention, and authorizes the merit-based hiring of new immigration judges.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association have condemned Trump's child separation policy. The President of the American Academy of Pediatrics called it, "government-sanctioned child abuse."

Last month, Durbin and 40 other Senators asked the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Inspector General to investigate HHS' role in implementing President Trump's zero tolerance policy. Last week, Durbin led 30 other Senators in calling for Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General Michael Horowitz to [investigate](#) DOJ's role in the creation and implementation of the zero tolerance policy.

In June, Durbin [wrote](#) to President Trump and called on him to immediately announce his intention to fully comply with a federal district court's order to return children separated under his Administration's "zero tolerance" policy to their parents within 30 days, and within 14 days for children under age five, and to regularly update Congress on his progress towards meeting the court's deadlines. Durbin has yet to receive a response to his letter.

In March, Durbin and 23 of his Senate colleagues pressed the DHS Acting Inspector General to investigate allegations that DHS was separating the children of asylum-seekers from their parents. This request followed [reports](#) of the case of a seven-year-old girl and her mother from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) who were separated for more than four months after they presented themselves at the U.S. border and sought protection in accordance with the law.