

January 12, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Secretary Johnson and Attorney General Lynch,

We, the undersigned veterans' service organizations and veterans legal services providers, are deeply troubled by the recent immigration raids that target Central American refugee parents and children, a population suffering from severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other trauma-related conditions. No one understands better than veterans the profound health impacts of exposure to trauma. We urge the Administration to immediately modify its immigration enforcement and removal operations to accommodate PTSD and other trauma-related disabilities suffered by these refugees.

We, our members, and the veterans we serve, know full well the extraordinary challenges of living with the health consequences of exposure to trauma, including PTSD. For decades our organizations have fought to have the U.S. government recognize the debilitating effects of this invisible injury on service members returning home. Because of our efforts, there is a deeper understanding about this disability by the general public and greater accommodations by the government, although much work remains to be done. As veterans' service organizations, we must speak out and re-iterate that PTSD and other trauma-related health conditions are disabilities that warrant reasonable accommodations under the law.

We understand that many of the refugees fleeing from Central America suffer from severe PTSD due to extreme violence in their countries of origin. They include women who have survived sexual assault and other gender- or gang-based violence. These refugees, many who meet the diagnostic criteria of PTSD or other trauma-related conditions, are disabled and should be provided reasonable accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Reports of the violent conduct of the current immigration raids are especially troubling because they risk further re-traumatizing a population already suffering from PTSD. The Administration must acknowledge the seriousness of this disability among this target population and adjust their operations to prevent further harm.

Sincerely,

Veterans' Service Organizations

National Veterans Council for Legal Redress
Swords to Plowshares
Veterans Health Council
Vietnam Veterans of America

Veterans Legal Services Providers

Lewis B. Puller, Jr. Veterans Benefits Clinic, William & Mary Law School
Veteran Advocacy Project, Urban Justice Center
Veterans Law Center, University of Wisconsin Law School Pro Bono Program
Veterans Legal Assistance Clinic, Thomas Jefferson School of Law
Veterans Legal Clinic, Syracuse University College of Law
Veterans Legal Services Clinic, Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization at Yale Law School

cc: Stevan Bunnell, General Counsel
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