

Public Opinion on Legal Services for Immigrant Children & Families

National Polling Highlights

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As Congress considers federal funding, oversight, and immigration policy, newly released national polling shows that the vast majority of Americans support legal protections for immigrant children – and oppose harsh enforcement practices that put families and children at risk.

A nationally representative survey of 1,004 U.S. adults conducted March 19-21, 2025, reveals broad public support for due process, independent legal representation, and humane treatment of immigrant children and families. It also highlights key vulnerabilities – including public confusion, susceptibility to harsh rhetoric, and uncertainty around legal protections – that policymakers should not ignore.

Strong Support for Legal Services for Children

When asked about unaccompanied children in immigration proceedings, 61 percent of respondents believe children should be guaranteed access to legal services and support.

Should unaccompanied children be guaranteed access to legal support and services?



Moreover, 68 percent support specialized, child-focused legal services that help young people understand their rights and options. After learning that the federal government briefly suspended funding for such programs, 62 percent supported continued investment in these services.

These findings reflect a broad public understanding that legal representation is essential – not optional – when children face high-stakes immigration court proceedings alone.

Rejection of Enforcement in Sensitive Locations

The survey also showed strong opposition to immigration enforcement in places that have traditionally been viewed as off-limits: A clear majority opposes ICE targeting immigrant youth in sensitive locations. This suggests that Americans expect these locations to remain safe, trusted places for families and communities - not targets for arrest and detention.

Should immigrant youth be targeted in ICE raids at schools, hospitals, and houses of worship?



Americans Prefer Community Placement Over Detention

When asked about how to handle unaccompanied children, respondents recognized that children should be released to vetted sponsors while their immigration case proceeds.

Should unaccompanied children be released to vetted sponsors or detained in government custody?



The public also rejects mass family detention, with only 36 percent supporting the practice of detaining families with minor children.

Due Process Matters to Voters

There is strong affirmation of constitutional principles, even in the context of immigration enforcement. Nearly two-thirds of respondents support due process protections for unaccompanied children.

Should unaccompanied children have due process protections in the U.S. immigration system?



Additionally, 68 percent agree that eliminating legal services increases the risk of trafficking and abuse. And 63 percent believe removing legal services will make it more likely that children will be lost in the system and will increase inefficiencies in the immigration court process.

Preference for Independent Legal Providers

A key theme from the survey is trust in independence. Respondents do not support the use of government employees to deliver legal support, favoring connections with independent attorneys. This distinction matters – it shows that Americans value fairness and impartiality when children are up against a powerful federal system.

Who should provide legal services for unaccompanied children?



Warning Signs & Strategic Risks

While most respondents support legal protections for immigrants, the data also reveals areas of concern. A notable minority backs punitive measures - such as raids in sensitive areas (31%) and child detention (28%) - and between 11% to 22% of respondents indicated they were unsure across several questions. These gaps in understanding create openings for bad-faith actors to exploit confusion and justify harmful policy shifts.

Implications for Policymakers

Americans want policymakers to protect and expand funding for legal representation of unaccompanied children, ensure independent legal providers remain central to immigration legal services – not replaced by government contractors within detention centers, and prohibit immigration enforcement in sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals, and houses of worship. Public dialogue will benefit from investments in public education to close information gaps and prevent misinformation.

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