

March 2, 2015

Re: Markup of: H.R. 1149, the “Protection of Children Act of 2015” and H.R. 1153, the “Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act of 2015

Dear colleague,

We are writing to express our concern over some of the provisions in HR 1149, “The Protection of Children Act”, and HR 1153, “The Asylum Reform and Border Protection Act” and to ask that you oppose any attempts to weaken support for children seeking asylum in the United States.

For years, minors from Guatemala, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras and other Central American nations have sought refuge in the United States. However, their numbers increased dramatically in late 2013 because of violence, extreme poverty and other factors that were making their and their families’ lives untenable. Between October 2013 and July of this year, more than 63,000 unaccompanied children arrived at the U.S. border. During that same time period, another 63,000 families – some with young children – were picked up.

Since June 2014, Save the Children has been responding to the needs of children crossing the US/Mexico border through an integrated child protection, health and non-formal education approach. Save the Children is also on the ground in each of the countries that the majority of children and families arriving at the U.S. border call home: Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico. We are committed to helping to protect Central American children from violence, exploitation and poverty, and are exploring ways to expand our work to address both children’s longstanding protection needs and the underlying causes of migration.

Both U.S. and international laws require the US to uphold the legal rights of children, especially those with a possible claim to asylum. The US has an obligation to ensure children are not returned to life threatening situations. **To this end, we are concerned about any language in HR 1149 and HR 1153 that would weaken provisions of the 2008 Trafficking Victim Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) and put at risk adequate screening and representation for unaccompanied children.** We are also concerned about any provisions that would limit access to humanitarian parole and weaken the asylum process.

The United States is respected worldwide as a leader in the humanitarian field. **We urge that the US put children’s needs above politics and uphold the current provisions in TVPRA, ensuring basic components are in place to provide children with fair and adequate support.** Children should be provided with adequate legal counsel and representation, sufficient time to make a case and have it properly considered, and appropriate resources and support during legal proceedings.

Thank you for your consideration.



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