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Grave Health and Safety Concerns of Children and Immigration addressed by AzAAP

Phoenix, Arizona – July 27, 2010 - The American Academy of Pediatrics – Arizona Chapter (AzAAP) recommend undocumented parents have a plan in place if they are separated from their children and need access to healthcare for medical and behavioral care. Some pediatricians have expressed concerns about the impact of Senate Bill 1070 on children's health and others are already seeing the effect on their young patients in that children whose undocumented parents withhold or defer their medical care due to fear of being deported.

It is the real and constant fear that parental deportation carries and the numerous mental health risks associated with this fear. "The mission of pediatric care is to promote and monitor the physical, mental and behavioral health of children at every stage of development" according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina include the impact of family separation on children, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Recent studies show that young children not only exhibit symptoms of PTSD and depression that are similar to adults, but may react more strongly to trauma. This includes children in drop houses, who are smuggled, kidnapped or used by "coyotes" or as their parents are subjected to this. "Not only do children face increased vulnerability to their immediate physical well-being, but childhood development is often compromised with serious risks for long term growth and survival", according to "Defining Best Practice in Care and Protection of Children in Crisis-Affected Settings: A Delphi Study."

If Arizona's foster care system becomes the means to care for children that are suddenly left without one or both parents due to deportation, the cost per child per month is \$1,450 for medical and behavioral health costs alone, according to Arizona Department of Health Services and the Division of Behavioral Health Services. Putting aside costs, any immigration enforcement acts should have procedures that take into consideration the impact on the child including allowing parents to make calls to an attorney, legal guardian, physician and/or welfare agencies according to the "Humane Enforcement and Legal Protections for Separated Children Act", a bill currently before the US Congress.

To prepare for enforcement of SB1070, Arturo Gonzalez, M.D., President of the AzAAP is recommending that if undocumented parents are taken into custody and choose to leave their U.S. born children in the U.S. legally, they should make arrangements for the care of their children. "We're asking parents to obtain power of attorney for someone to care for their children if they are deported," Dr. Gonzalez said. Also, parents need to disclose medical information that is necessary to protect the health and safety of their children. "One of the populations that will most significantly be affected by this law are U.S. born children with special health care needs whose parents are undocumented", said Dr. Gonzalez. "We cannot hold a 6 month old infant or a 2 year old accountable for their parents' decisions or the actions of their government," says Sue Braga, AzAAP Executive Director.

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The Arizona Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics is an organization of over 900 primary care pediatricians, pediatric specialists, nurses and other pediatric healthcare providers dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.