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The Honorable Thomas Homan  
Acting Director, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
500 12th St, SW  
Washington, DC 20536

Dear Acting Director Homan:

We are writing on behalf of the Mount Sinai Program in Human Rights in New York City (<https://mountsinaihumanrights.org>). Our program's mission is to advance health, dignity, and justice, both locally and globally, by providing pro-bono, trauma-informed medical assessments, mental health evaluations, and access to social services and continuity medical care to U.S. asylum seekers who are survivors of torture and human rights abuses. Our collective experience working with asylees extends back many years and has been acquired in a city and state that are among the most common destinations for asylees in the United States. We are writing regarding Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) end to its policy of presumptive release of pregnant women and adolescents from immigration detention facilities to express our concern about the mental health impact of this decision on both the mother and their future child.

Elevation in general stress levels, irrespective of psychiatric diagnosis, increases the risk for pregnancies that are small for gestational age and for pre-term birth as well as low birthweight. (3) More specifically, depression during mid-term pregnancy may increase risk for small for gestational age pregnancies. (4) Although more studies are needed to clarify findings regarding other outcomes, PTSD has itself been associated with low for gestational age pregnancies and lower rates of breastfeeding. (5) Finally, there is increasing evidence that maternal stress causes changes in gene expression that become transmitted in utero through so-called "transgenerational transmission of trauma", contributing to the risk of their offspring eventually developing a range of psychiatric illnesses later in life. (6)

On top of the many other factors that may jeopardize the health of detainees' pregnancy, including limited prenatal care in their home country, these psychological factors only add to the obstetrical risks posed by detaining pregnant women and adolescents. The emerging research on the effect of maternal stress on unborn children is pointing towards a significant connection between the two. We therefore respectfully urge you to reconsider ICE's updated policy for detaining these women and adolescents and would welcome the chance to any answer questions you may have about our professional opinion on the matter.

Sincerely,

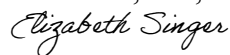


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