July 23, 2019

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I am writing to urge the House to pass H.R. 3239, the “Humanitarian Standards for Individuals in Customs and Border Protection Custody Act,” which ensures protections for children and families being detained while seeking asylum. The current conditions our government is putting these individuals in amounts to government-sponsored abuse and is unbecoming of the greatest nation in the world.

The bill would require all individuals in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody to receive an initial medical screening and set minimum standards of detention for hygiene, nutrition, and safer shelter arrangements that government officials must meet. The 10 deaths in government custody in the last nine months, including three children, may be a direct result of the lack of basic protections for people in these detention centers.

It is necessary to ensure CBP and other contractors are required to focus on humanitarian care and are provided the tools needed to do so. The American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, among many other adoption and child abuse prevention organizations, agree – detention facilities are no environment for children. Any proposal to solve this problem must include appropriate funding for professional child care staff, greater transparency, clear expectations and concise strategies for departmental tracking and evaluation of these people.

AFSCME members make caring for families and communities their life’s work. From social workers to nurses and school bus drivers to first responders, public service employees protect children and families. The current policy is cruel and inhumane. We urge Congress to protect immigrant children and families who have been detained and pass H.R. 3239.

Sincerely,

Scott Frey
Director of Federal Government Affairs

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