

EXHIBIT B

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On Family Separation, Federal Workers Often Agonized Over Enforcement

By Caitlin Dickerson

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The federal bureaucracy that carried out the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” policy was conflicted over it: As some officials supported the seizing of children from their migrant parents under orders from the White House, others felt helpless in their cubicles, shed tears and went home wracked with guilt.

A career official at the civil rights office of the Homeland Security Department, whose job is to process complaints by people who feel they have been mistreated, watched staff members crumple into tears at their desks. They were overwhelmed with hundreds of pleas a week, written on behalf of migrant parents and children searching desperately for one another. The pleas came with photographs taken at the border of the missing children. They showed “5-year-olds who don’t know how to take a picture without smiling,” said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity. “They look like school photos.”

A manager in the same department printed some of the photographs in an attempt to seek support, both logistical and emotional, from Cameron Quinn, who was appointed by President Trump to oversee their work, the official said. The manager presented Ms. Quinn with the children’s photos at a meeting.

Interviews with more than a dozen employees at the three federal agencies tasked with carrying out the president’s orders said they were feeling alienated and exhausted after being ordered to carry out, then halt, the separations — as well as deal with the fallout.

On Friday, protesters gathered outside the Alexandria, Va., home of Kirstjen Nielsen, the secretary of Homeland Security, demanding her resignation over the policy. They distributed leaflets calling her a “child snatcher.” Some of those much further down the government’s pecking order said they faced pressures of their own, according to interviews with officials at Immigration and Customs Enforcement, United States Customs and Border Protection and the Health and Human Services Department.



An undocumented immigrant at a federal court in McAllen, Tex. Tamir Kalifa for The New York Times

“There’s an eye-of-the-hurricane feeling,” said an ICE official involved in the deportation of a 6-year-old boy who was separated from his father. The official had “no idea” where the boy’s father was and had considered quitting in recent weeks, but decided to stay “to provide balance and bear witness and see it through.”

Whether they endorsed the president’s policy or abhorred it, employees across the federal system expressed frustration that major changes came without advance notice. One official who works on custody issues at ICE said an email about the executive order reversing the policy arrived “literally at the same time that it was breaking on CNN.”

Anguish over family separation began at the Health and Human Services Department, which cares for children in federal custody, within months of Mr. Trump’s taking office, when representatives of the new administration started to float ideas for more aggressive enforcement actions, officials said.

Employees of the agency, some of whom are social workers and child advocates, said they had protested the idea. They hoped it would be dropped after the public outcry that followed an acknowledgment last year by John Kelly, who was then the secretary of Homeland Security, that it was under consideration. White House officials subsequently backed away from the idea.

But starting last fall, employees of the agency noticed a surge in children coming into their care who had entered the country with a parent, according to an official there who has served under two administrations. By April, the numbers had risen to more than 700. The administration initially claimed that separations were not happening but eventually acknowledged that they were.

Before the policy was called to a halt, Mr. Trump and his aides alternately embraced the crackdown and blamed it on Democrats.

At ICE, sympathetic employees from across the agency sprang into action after the zero-tolerance policy was announced to help reunite parents and children, according to two officials there.

An immigration processing center in Aurora, Colo. Nick Cote for The New York Times

Employees in Washington dialed up field offices in an effort to reconnect families. People worked at their desks late into the night, searching for data that could be used to reunify families. Late Saturday night, the Department of Homeland Security said 522 children had been reunited with their parents.

After Mr. Trump called on Wednesday for an abrupt end to the separations, significant questions remained over what to do with adults in custody who claimed that their children had been taken. Should they be released and allowed to pick up the children, many of whom have been sent to

shelters in far-flung states? Should they be held in custody and only reunited before deportation, which could take months?

At the Border Patrol, where many are seen as supporting the president's hard-line stance on the border, two agents worried that the effort to reunite parents and children, if not done carefully, could end up leaving children with human traffickers. One of the officials spoke of children who had been apprehended with methamphetamine strapped to their waists and who were traveling with adult smugglers.

Considerable confusion has mounted at ICE over how to proceed now that the family separation practice had been suspended. Inside the Border Patrol, high-ranking officials shot off a flurry of emails into the early hours of Thursday morning with evolving guidance.

One message, sent at 9:54 p.m. on Wednesday by Chief Patrol Agent Brian Hastings, ordered agents to "immediately suspend" prosecutions of migrant parents "and maintain family unity." Later messages told the agents to use discretion in deciding whether to reunify parents and children right away or to wait.

At the Health and Human Services Department, the suspension of the policy prompted a scramble to begin reuniting parents and children. One official put the number of cases at 3,000, higher than the official counts from the government.

"The reaction was a little bit of happiness but not glee or anything," the official said. "It was like 'O.K., how do we get them back to their parents?'"

Miriam Jordan, Manny Fernandez and Ron Nixon contributed reporting.

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