

Yangchen Lhamo
90-65 55th Avenue
Elmhurst, NY 11373

March 7, 2020

Senator Charles E. Schumer
780 Third Avenue, Suite 2301
New York, NY 10017

Dear Senator Schumer:

We write to urge you to cosponsor new legislation introduced by Senator Harris in 2019: Senate Bill 388, the ‘Families, Not Facilities Act’ that aids undocumented children. The bill, as well as amending Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regulations related to immigrant children that enter the United States unaccompanied by a guardian, proposes that the Office of Refugee Settlement provide services for unaccompanied immigrant children. Such services include assisting with: school enrollment and acculturation; locating medical and therapeutic services, and navigating new family settings. Unaccompanied alien children are currently transferred from the DHS to the Office of Refugee Resettlement who have the responsibility of the children’s care and placement.¹ Expanding the Office’s services would undoubtedly boost child welfare, the mission of the Office. Funding for such services, according to the bill, will be found by redirecting money appropriated for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Primarily, we believe in this bill because we think that directing funding from ICE, an agency under DHS that have caused much harm to families, to services that heal and prevent abuses (e.g. child trafficking, which the Office of Refugee Resettlement looks into) is not only ethical but also healing to the damaged communities that the families are a part of.

Undocumented children have persevered to tell their part in American history despite distinct disparities in social security, taxation, and education contribution to benefits received compared to documented children.² The immigration system fails undocumented children that are raised unaware of their status and/or unable to access resources. Additionally, putting the responsibility of children on parents –when multiple factors shaping their childhood is out of the parents’ control– is a fallacy. Inaccessible citizenship and the benefits that come along with it, combined with the “zero-tolerance policy” –announced by Attorney General Sessions in 2018– has resulted in undocumented children being forcefully separated from their parents at the border and has caused mass harm among undocumented people.³ The policy is undoubtedly inhumane in its goal of ensuring that migrant families face tremendous costs at the border, and the data –from the Health and Human Services’ (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement– used to justify the policy is worryingly questionable as much of it is has not been made publicly available.⁴ Moreover, the terminology used by the HHS often overshadows the reality that children are considered “unaccompanied” at the point at which they are detained because it is expected

¹ ‘Unaccompanied Alien Children’. *Office of Refugee Resettlement*. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/ucs>

² ‘Date One Sheet| SDSU’. <https://newscenter.sdsu.edu/education/cescal-conference/resources.aspx>

³ ‘Attorney General Sessions Delivers Remarks Discussing the Immigration Enforcement Actions of the Trump Administration’. 2018. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/speech/attorney-general-sessions-delivers-remarks-discussing-immigration-enforcement-actions>

⁴ ‘Unaccompanied Immigrant Children’. *National Immigrant Justice Center*. <https://immigrantjustice.org/issues/unaccompanied-immigrant-children>

that they will be separated from their parents.⁵ According to the American Psychological Association, research has found that undocumented immigrant children: “often experience in the short term, frequent crying, withdrawal, disrupted eating and sleeping patterns, anger, anxiety and depression. [This.] can lead to more severe issues like post-traumatic stress disorder.”⁶ Thousands of children have also been lost track of for extended periods of time, but as of today HHS agents cannot be held legally accountable for such negligence.⁷ In summary, inaccessible citizenship and the reality of the zero-tolerance policy traumatizes the undocumented community, who are a part of the United States. Government failure to hold themselves and ICE, known for forcing people into detention and acting much like reckless HHS agents, accountable for the consequences of malpractice and misconstrued data results in adverse effects for undocumented immigrant children, especially when their parents have been detained or even deported. Undocumented people are a vulnerable group already facing a lot, and bills like the ‘Families, Not Facilities Act’ that makes life a little bit better for undocumented children should be passed.

Yangchen, a longtime resident of Queens, has seen how crucial undocumented people are in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of their communities. Yangchen constantly moves between the majority East Asian working-class neighborhood of Elmhurst and the vibrant South Asian hub that’s Jackson Heights, volunteering for community organizations here and there. Tensions around immigration is palpable, especially in Jackson Heights given the large number of undocumented residents who have families and jobs there. Stories of ICE coming into homes without warrants, waiting for students on their way home, and generally harassing and abusing Queens residents are common. Fear of ICE has become so great that community members hold ‘Know Your Rights’ trainings so that residents can protect themselves.⁸ Yangchen is a citizen, and even he has received this training alongside other Queens youth. Yangchen wanted to know his rights when faced with threatening groups like ICE, who enact inhuman actions. Indeed, under the current administration, even citizens can get deported.⁹ That anybody should have to do these trainings at all indicates a systemic lack of care for the lives in Yangchen’s communities. In his competitive high school, Yangchen saw the effects of detainment on his friend whose father was arrested by ICE. His friend’s academics slowly slipped as he frequently slept in class due to stress at home in combination with rigorous schoolwork. Yangchen’s friend’s mother was battling cancer and was left to care for her two children by herself. Yangchen’s friend is not alone: there are many more stories like this in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst; the extent to which ICE is terrorizing Asian neighborhoods is frightening. The harm ICE has caused fueled the spread of Hate Free Zone, a “community defense system to defend communities from workplace raids, deportations, mass criminalization, violence, and systematic violation of rights and dignity.”¹⁰ Many stores and organizations in the neighborhood have pledged allegiance to this cause that fights back against damaging systems. The need for a community defense system in the first place speaks to the negligence residents of Jackson Heights and Elmhurst experience.

⁵ Kandel, William A. ‘Unaccompanied Alien Children: An Overview’.

⁶ ‘Undocumented Americans’. <https://www.apa.org>. <https://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/undocumented-video>

⁷ ‘Trump Administration Admits Losing Track of Immigrant Children - CNNPolitics’.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/19/politics/undocumented-immigrant-children-not-located-detention-released/index.html>

⁸ ‘Know Your Rights’. *Know Your Rights* | American Civil Liberties Union. <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights>

⁹ ‘U.S. Citizen Detained For Weeks, Nearly Deported By Immigration Officials’. *NPR*.

<https://www.npr.org/2019/07/25/745417268/u-s-citizen-detained-for-weeks-nearly-deported-by-immigration-officials>

¹⁰ ‘Hate Free Zones’. *Hate Free Zones*. <https://www.hatefreezones.org>

Yangchen's community had to take it upon themselves to teach each other how to protect one another. In writing this letter, we hope Senator Schumer will, along with cosponsoring bill 388, address this long-held grievance and ensure steps for much needed safety of community residents, undocumented or documented.

More funding and services by the Office of Refugee Resettlement will not undo all the trauma faced by the undocumented members of American society, but it would certainly be a step in the right direction. It is here where we urge you, our representative and linkage to a greater political process, to please show empathy to vulnerable children and cosponsor the 'Families, Not Facilities Act.' We know cosponsoring this bill will not be enough. We hope you understand the gravity of the situation undocumented children and adults bear, and to please take other actions to uplift our communities. So we urge you, Senator Schumer, to push ICE out of neighborhoods so community members can feel safe. We urge you, Senator Schumer, to decrease ICE presence so undocumented people -who make up the flourishing economy of Queens through their often unappreciated labor- and their relatives can feel safe walking in the streets and existing in their homes. We urge you, Senator Schumer, to listen to the pleas of your constituency, your Queens residents, and cosponsor this bill and future bills that curtails the harms of ICE, HHS, and similar systems.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read our letter. We hope to be able to collaborate on this issue in the near future.

Sincerely,

Yangchen Lhamo, Edward Tranter, and Chris Stone
Swarthmore College Class of 2023

Advocacy Proposal: Raising awareness of the plight of undocumented people via workshops, artwork, and campus clubs

We, Yangchen Lhamo, Edward Tranter, and Chris Stone, are submitting this proposal in hopes of improving the journey for people affected by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), particularly vulnerable children who never see their parents again. A custodian's immigration status should not block a child from being raised in a healthy, safe, and loving environment. Additionally, funding being redirected from ICE, who continue to bring cases like these, to services that heal and prevent abuses (e.g. child trafficking) is not only ethical but also healing to communities that the families are a part of.

Upon receiving funding for our project, we would begin planning workshops to hold around specific college campuses. We would hold our workshop at Swarthmore College, and open the event up to Tri-Co students (Bryn Mawr and Haverford share resources and events with Swarthmore College due to our close distance and Quaker roots), University of Pennsylvania, and Drexel University. We chose these three colleges because of its proximity to Philadelphia, home to at least fifty-thousand undocumented immigrants. All three colleges are private, and the majority of their student bodies are most likely uninformed or misinformed concerning the plight of undocumented people. Engaging with the student body through well-developed workshops not only raises awareness of ICE and undocumented people, but also fosters deep thinking about the forces behind movements of people and the regulation of organisational bodies. We would also reach out to Swarthmore's Asian organization, Organizing to Redefine "Asian" Activism, as well as Asian organizations of each of the three campuses we hold workshops in to see if they would like to help facilitate our workshops. We also plan to collaborate with community organizations in/near Philly to build workshops on immigrant and racial justice as they are heavily intertwined. We would focus on the significance of ICE on everyday United States residents who often ignore issues of undocumentedation because it seemingly does not affect them.

Another initiative is to host a student-run gallery of artworks at Swarthmore College in order to effectively provide a new perspective regarding the topic of immigration for Asian communities to the Swarthmore student body. Our plan is to work with Kitao, Swarthmore College's student-run art gallery, to curate and host this event. Yangchen has participated in an art program with his South Asian community organization in New York, where he collectively

created art reflecting stories of the South Asian community. One of Yangchen’s pieces of art includes a portrait of an undocumented woman who he helped interview for an exhibition. There is power in art, and these pieces would be especially moving and powerful and thus able to provide a new perspective to the Swarthmore student body. We will reach out/advertise this event through social media and flyers posted around campus. We anticipate 15-30 students and faculty, and will request funding from the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility to supply food and drinks for this event.

Finally, we hope to be able to work with the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility on Swarthmore’s campus to eventually start a club/advocacy group focusing on immigrant rights in the United States as a whole. Please find the table illustrating how we would spend our funding below.

Event	Supplies	Cost
Trips to Philadelphia to Meet with Organizations and Host Workshops	SEPTA tickets plus payment for workshop training and services from organisations	\$150
Compensating Artists for Showing Their Artwork About Immigration	We will use our laptop and phones and connections to email/call/text artists for permission to use their work	\$300
Other Supplies Needed for Our Activism work	Paper for flyers, posters, and any further required equipment	\$50

Thank you for taking the time to consider our advocacy proposal! We hope you share our enthusiasm about the effect our initiatives would have in educating students and faculty about the plight of undocumented people in the United States.

Sincerely,

Yangchen Lhamo, Edward Tranter, and Chris Stone

Swarthmore College Class of 2023

March 1, 2019