

The Post's View Opinion

Trump's Family Separation 2.0 comes at a cost to immigrants and the government

By Editorial Board

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HAVING FAILED to effectuate migrant family separation on a mass scale last year, the Trump administration has settled on a new scheme to torment struggling migrant families — this time by threatening to take children who are U.S. citizens from their parents who are not. The proposal — call it Family Separation 2.0 — targets households of mixed-immigration-status families who receive federal housing subsidies. Under a proposed rule pushed by the White House, those families would be ineligible for housing assistance if just one member, including a parent or guardian, lacked documents.

That would leave mixed-status families with the choice of breaking apart or becoming homeless. Legal residents could remain in their homes as undocumented members were evicted. More likely, according to an analysis by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, families would opt to vacate — and in many cases be left homeless. Ironically, HUD Secretary Ben Carson, whose mission includes combating homelessness, signed off on the proposal, even as his own department warned of the effects.

According to a study by the Migration Policy Institute, there were 5.1 million children under 18 living in the United States with at least one undocumented parent during 2009 to 2013. About 4.1 million of them, nearly 80 percent, were U.S. citizens, and many were in economically disadvantaged households.

In targeting them, the proposed policy dovetails with the administration's crusade of cruelty toward immigrants, legal and illegal. In the name of ridding assisted housing units of undocumented immigrants, President Trump and his policy adviser Stephen Miller would threaten about 25,000 households, with a combined population of 108,000 people. Of those, about 70 percent, or 76,000 residents, most of them children, are U.S. citizens and others legally eligible for benefits.

Under existing policy, those households can receive federal subsidies, prorated to include only citizens and legal residents and exclude unauthorized immigrants; the subsidies amount to \$8,400 annually on average for a family. If, under the proposed rule, those mixed-status families were evicted and replaced with households in which every member is eligible for federal housing assistance — meaning the federal government would no longer prorate subsidies — the cost to the government would increase by at least \$193 million a year. So this is a policy of cruelty that would also cost the government.

The blueprint devised by the White House encapsulates the administration's approach to illegal immigrants. It seeks to make their lives miserable, specifically targeting children. It explicitly contravenes other stated goals,

including combating homelessness. And it plays havoc with a departmental budget. A clean sweep of callousness for an administration notorious for coldheartedness.

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