DATE

Dear SENATOR’S OR REPRESENTATIVE’S NAME,

INCLUDE A BRIEF PARAGRAPH ABOUT YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY HISTORY. YOU MIGHT MENTION WHERE YOUR PARENTS/GRANDPARENTS CAME FROM AND WHY THEY IMMIGRATED.

I am writing to voice my support for refugee children who are migrating to the U.S. to escape violence in Central America, and ask that as my representative you support programs that help these children, both in the U.S. and in Central America.

In recent years, many children and families have been fleeing some of the most violent countries in the world—El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala. They are coming to the U.S. seeking refuge. Our country was a leader in the Refugee Convention; we signed treaties and passed laws that said that as a nation we vow to protect people fleeing persecution.

As such I would urge you to support:

* Continued foreign aid to Central America that specifically funds violence prevention programs that have shown promise in reducing homicides and the number of children who feel forced to flee their home countries. The only way to reduce immigration is to address the factors pushing people out of these countries. The U.S. must play a role. Foreign aid was recently increased to $750 million a year to the region. These programs are a lot cheaper than billions needed to deal with these children once they are on our doorstep.
* While we work to help these countries improve, we must remain compassionate and humane towards children who are fleeing for their lives. Do not strip them of special protections these children deserve—the right to go before an immigration judge for a full hearing and not be quickly deported; the right to not be held for long periods in immigration jails but instead be transferred to child-friendly shelters operated by Health and Human Services and released to a parent or sponsor while their court hearings proceed.

We should treat children with kindness and decency because they are children.

* Finally, we should provide refugee children with government lawyers if they cannot afford a lawyer. Our government provides accused murderers with public counsel if the accused cannot afford one, but immigrants, even immigrant children get nothing. Most can’t afford a lawyer, and more than half are going to immigration court alone (even toddlers!) and expected to argue a complex immigration asylum case. The United Nations has estimated that 6 in 10 of these kids are fleeing violence in their home country and that they would likely merit international protection. But only 10 percent of them are getting that protection when they don’t have an attorney making their case; 70 percent get it if they have a lawyer. For many of these children, these court decisions have life or death consequences.

This treatment of children is not worthy of our court system, of our country.

Other actions we should take to help these children:

* We should stop paying Mexico tens of million of dollars to intercept and deport these children before they reach our border. Mexican officials deported nearly 20,000 unaccompanied immigrant children back south of their border last year, four times the number a few years ago. They are doing this because the U.S. is asking and paying them to.
* We should increase the number of refugees we allow to pre-9/11 levels -- 130,000, from the current 50,000 -- to allow more of these children to have a safe harbor here in the U.S.

Please stand up for unaccompanied immigrant children. Don’t just stand by.

If you have any questions, please contact me at TELEPHONE OR EMAIL.

Respectfully,

NAME

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE ZIP CODE