

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

Submitted to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and Limited Government

Hearing: "Immigration Policy by Court Order: The Adverse Effects of *Plyler v. Doe*"

March 18, 2026

The title of this hearing frames *Plyler v. Doe* as a problem. The undersigned organizations respectfully submit that the evidence points in the opposite direction. For more than forty years, *Plyler* has been one of the quiet pillars of American public education, ensuring that every child, regardless of immigration status, can walk through a schoolhouse door. The question before this Subcommittee should not be whether that protection has cost too much. The question is what we lose, in our children, in our communities, in our economic prosperity, and in the future of this country, if we take it away.

What *Plyler* Means for Children

The central harm of eroding *Plyler* is not abstract. It lands on children.

We already have evidence of what happens when immigration enforcement chills access to schools, even without formal exclusion. A 2025 nationally representative UCLA survey of more than 600 high school principals found that nearly two-thirds reported students from immigrant families missing school, not because any school turned them away, but because families were afraid.¹ A 2025 working paper published by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University found that students in five California Central Valley counties missed an estimated 22 percent more school days during the spring of 2025 than in prior years.² Pre-kindergarten absences rose an estimated 35 percent. These are not undocumented children alone. They are children in mixed-status families. They are US citizen children whose parents are afraid. They are children who have every legal right to be in a classroom and are not there.

This matters because a child who is afraid cannot learn. Research is unambiguous that chronic absenteeism, trauma, and acute stress impair cognitive development, academic achievement, and long-term outcomes.³ When *Plyler* protections erode, the harm does not stop at the child who is excluded or deterred. It ripples through every classroom those children are missing from, affecting teachers, disrupting instruction, and diminishing the educational experience of every student in the room.

¹ John Rogers, Joseph Kahne, Deborah La Torre, Charity Castro, Samuel Stern, Micaela Bronstein, and Michael Ishimoto, "'The Fear is Everywhere': U.S. High School Principals Report Widespread Effects of Immigration Enforcement" (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, December 2025), <https://idea.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/fear-is-everywhere/>

² Dee, Thomas S.. (2025). Recent Immigration Raids Increased Student Absences. (EdWorkingPaper: 25-1202). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/a62e-h526>

³ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, "Toxic Stress Derails Healthy Development," Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, accessed March 2026, <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

Alabama's experience in 2011 is instructive.⁴ After the state enacted HB 56, which required school administrators to verify students' immigration status at enrollment, more than 13 percent of Latino students withdrew from Alabama public schools in the first six months alone, even though immigrants as a whole constituted less than half of one percent of Alabama's student population. Nearly all of the children who left were US citizens. They had every right to be there. They left because their families were frightened. The school enrollment provision was struck down as a violation of *Plyler* before it could be fully implemented. The courts reaffirmed children's rights. But the harm to those children had already been done.

What *Plyler* Protects Beyond Immigrant Children

The logic being advanced to dismantle *Plyler*, that a category of children can be excluded from public education on the basis of a status they did not choose and cannot change, is not new. And it does not stay contained.

Before Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, schools routinely excluded students with disabilities using nearly identical arguments: that the cost was too high, that the burden was too great, and that there was no constitutional obligation to serve them. The Supreme Court in *Plyler* drew on that very history, recognizing that denying a class of children access to education inflicts the kind of permanent, irreversible harm the Constitution cannot permit. Students experiencing homelessness have had to fight for their right to remain enrolled under the McKinney-Vento Act. Students in foster care have had to fight for stability and continuity in their schooling. Students displaced by natural disasters have had to fight to stay connected to their education. In each case, the principle was the same: no child should be excluded from school because of circumstances beyond their control.

Accepting the premise that immigration status justifies exclusion does not create a narrow exception. It creates a template. The undersigned organizations urge this Subcommittee to consider carefully what limiting principle remains once that door is open.

What *Plyler* Has Produced for Communities and the Country

The argument for overturning *Plyler* rests on a claim of unsustainable fiscal burden. The data does not support that claim.

Research by FWD.us found that *Plyler* beneficiaries have paid more in state and local income taxes over their lifetimes than the total cost of educating them by over \$633 billion.⁵ That is not a burden. That is a return on investment. In 2023 alone, households led by undocumented immigrants paid \$89.8 billion in total federal, state, and local taxes, including \$33.9 billion in state and local taxes, the very taxes that fund public schools. In 40

⁴ American Immigration Council, "Public Education for Immigrant Students: Understanding *Plyler v. Doe*," fact sheet, January 2025, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/fact-sheet/plyler-v-doe-public-education-immigrant-students/>.

⁵ Scott D. Levy and Phillip Connor, "The Power of *Plyler*: The Societal and Economic Gains of Equal Access to Education for Undocumented Children and the Future Losses if It Is Taken Away," FWD.us, December 2025, <https://www.fwd.us/news/the-power-of-plyler/>

out of 50 states, undocumented immigrants pay a higher effective state and local tax rate than the top one percent of households.

Reversing *Plyler* would not produce savings. It would produce costs. The same FWD.us analysis found that if undocumented children were excluded from public schools, the US economy would lose more than \$1 trillion in income over the lifetimes of current *Plyler* beneficiaries, the workforce would shrink by 450,000 workers in jobs requiring at least a high school education, and healthcare costs for preventable conditions would increase by \$24.2 billion. Requiring schools to certify the immigration status of all students would also add significant administrative costs to schools as well as a new burden on all families enrolling children in school. An analysis by the Immigration Research Initiative of two Tennessee education bills that would require documentation of students' status found that the cost to Tennessee taxpayers would be around \$55 million in the first year alone.⁶

Conclusion

Plyler v. Doe is not immigration policy by court order. It is a constitutional recognition that children are not responsible for the circumstances of their birth or arrival, and that a country which denies children an education pays a price no one can afford.

The undersigned organizations urge the members of this Subcommittee to keep the focus of this hearing where it belongs: on the children sitting in classrooms across this country, on the communities their families have built, and on the forty years of evidence that educating every child is not a burden. It is the foundation of our nation.

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AP-OD (Abriendo Puertas/Opening Doors)

Asian Americans Advancing Justice- AAJC

Association of Educational Service Agencies

Breakthrough Central Texas

Bridges to Academic Success, CUNY

Brown's Promise

BUILD Initiative

California Newcomer Network

California School-Based Health Alliance (CSHA)

Center for Law and Social Policy

⁶ David Dyssegaard Kallick and Anthony Capote, "The Unforeseen Fiscal Cost of Verifying Student Immigration Status," Immigration Research Initiative, March 2, 2026, <https://immresearch.org/publications/the-unforeseen-fiscal-cost-of-verifying-student-immigration-status/>

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Chinese for Affirmative Action
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Columbus Education Justice Coalition
Communities Upwards
Corridor Community Action Network
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Dream Project, Inc.
Dream Squad at Bard High School Early College Queens
EDGE Partners
EdTrust
EdTrust - New York
Education Justice Alliance
Education Law Center-PA
Education Policy, Birth – 12th Grade, New America.
Educators for Excellence
EduColor
EL/La Para TransLatinas
Equality California
Faith Choice Ohio
Families In Schools (FIS)
Glide Foundation
Good Samaritan FRC
Hands United
High School English teacher
Honesty for Ohio Education
IDRA
Immigrant Connections
ImmSchools
InnovateEDU
Internationals Network for Public Schools
Kentucky Coalition for English Learners
Kids First Chicago
Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)
Las Doñas
Latino Community Center
Latino Community Fund Georgia
Latino Policy Forum
League of Education Voters
Love in Action Advocacy
Massachusetts Advocates for Children
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
Michigan's Children
MinneSLIFE
Mission Graduates
NAELPA - National Association of English Learner Program Administrators

National Association for Family Child Care
National Association of Social Workers
National Charter Collaborative
National Council on Teacher Quality
National Education Association
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Newcomer Network
National PTA
National Rural Education Association
NBJC
New Jersey Alliance for Immigrant Justice
New Jersey Consortium for Immigrant Children
Newcomer and ELL Services
NJTESOL/NJBE
Ohio TESOL
OneAmerica
Partnership for the Future of Learning
People for Peace and Justice, Sandusky County
Pint Size Protesters
Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration
Public Counsel
Public School Forum of North Carolina
Refugee & Immigrant Transitions
Right to Read Ohio
Rising Voices
SchoolHouse Connection
SF Parents Coalition
Southeast Dignity not Detention Coalition
Southern California College Attainment Network
Stop AAPI Hate
Students Engaged in Advancing Texas (SEAT)
TESOL International Association
The Children's Partnership
The Collaborative for Inclusive Education
The Education Neuroscience Foundation
The National Parents Union
The Workers Circle
UnidosUS
United Parent Leaders Action Network
Washington State Association of Head Start and ECEAP
WE RISE SF
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