



PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Psychologists for Social Responsibility Statement on the Treatment of Asylum Seekers and COVID-19

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) is calling for the immediate repeal of Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) and for the end to the continued assault on the basic human rights of asylum seekers within migrant prisons and camps on the US/Mexico border. In particular, as an organization that represents many U.S. clinical psychologists, we call on the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to cease its breaches of client confidentiality by sharing therapy notes with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a practice that makes any semblance of client trust in therapists, and any hope of helping clients impossible. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has threatened the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. In the migrant camps on the US/Mexico border, hundreds of immuno-compromised people are living in squalid conditions, with extremely limited access to medical care, due to the violent “Remain in Mexico” policy / Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP). Even the most basic attempts at human treatment for detainees, amid this swelling crisis, have been met with resistance and or complete restriction, for instance, the administration of free flu shots to asylum seekers, which could increase the safety and wellbeing for everyone on US/Mexico border have been thwarted by the Trump Administration. Without immediate action, thousands of innocent lives could be lost to COVID-19.

We demand an immediate end to the sharing of confidential psychotherapy notes with ICE, and further we demand that the Supreme Court moves with urgency to end Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) in order to ensure the safe passage of asylum seekers into the United States.

The abuse of psychology all too often serves an oppressive function. In this larger context it becomes clear that abuses of the nuanced practice of psychology have historical roots, which have since been rejected by the field in theory, and must now be rejected, vehemently, in practice. For decades, there have been unethical applications of psychological knowledge and training. Diagnoses have been used to pathologize dissent, confidentiality and patient well-being are often compromised in mental health services within US prisons, and psychologists and other mental health professionals operating within the US Prison Industrial Complex and other compromised spaces who have witnessed prisoner abuse, have been forced to remain silent, often under the guise of national security. Mental health professionals working in such institutions are all too frequently conflicted, forced to choose between their duty to carry out the priorities of those in command, and the best possible care for their clients and at the very least to

do no harm. The difficult choices thrust upon mental health professionals in these instances, and particularly in the midst of a global pandemic, can make the difference between life and death.

This organization has fought tirelessly against the use of psychologists to devise torture techniques in Guantanamo and other prisons abroad, and won. Our intent is to continue to protect the integrity of our field. We unapologetically oppose any misuse of our discipline, in Guantanamo, on the US/Mexico border, and wherever else policy and persons seek to corrupt this work and do harm. As Psychologists for Social Responsibility, we believe that there is no such thing as dual loyalty under existing systems of oppression, in particular, colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism. Our only loyalty is to the fight for collective liberation and justice for all oppressed peoples, as a necessary component of their mental health and overall physical and social well-being. ORR's violations of client confidentiality are not simply institutional betrayal, they are just one manifestation of the continued dominance and exploitation of vulnerable populations.

We believe that the wellbeing of all people must be protected for the good of the planet. The integrity and healing potential of our work, and indeed, of our field, depends on confidentiality, the trust of our clients, and our every effort to insure that they are done no harm. Although we are hopeful that recent legislation put forth by the US House of Representatives will stop the use of confidential therapy notes, we remain steadfast in our demand for reparations for the irreversible harm this practice has caused asylum seekers. And we will continue to fight in solidarity with all asylum seekers for their right to safety, dignity, and liberation from the oppressive, cruel, and racist policies. Therefore, although our demands are immediate and of the utmost importance, it is only the beginning of the work necessary to move beyond the urgency of upholding and protecting client confidentiality and treating the immediate health needs of detainees; we seek deep societal transformation of the field and the institutions in which we conduct our work. Our beliefs and values must inform laws and practices, and ultimately structure institutions, mitigating the moral injury of our field. We must work toward legislative change and beyond. Most urgently, we demand the following:

Immediate and Short Term Demands:

- * We demand the preservation of the universal human right to migrate and seek asylum
- * End of Migrant Protection Protocols that are barring asylum seekers safe passage to the United States
- * Strengthening of the APA ethics code regarding protections for clients within total institutions and whistleblower protections for prison health professionals who witness prisoner abuse.
- * Complete separation of law enforcement and provision of mental health services, including a safeguard protecting client records and ensuring that the content of medical and mental health records cannot be used against the client
- * Guidelines and Ethics training of mental health professionals and students regarding informed consent, protection of records, prevention of incriminating information in psychotherapy notes, and obligations in a dual loyalty conflict.

- * End to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) practice of reporting about the activities of the children in their care to ICE
- * Safe passage to the US for ALL asylum seekers
- * Granting refugee status to all unaccompanied minors
- * Expedited process to grant asylum for Kevin Euceda, as well as compensation for the harm caused by the public exposure of his case
- * Guaranteed protection of Sanctuary cities and banning of ICE access to migrants

Long Term Demands

- * Abolish migrant prisons
- * End to family separation
- * Abolish ICE
- * Demilitarize the border and put the resources towards safe passage of asylum seekers

As psychologists practicing in an era of immense suffering and panic, we recognize the importance of centering the voices of the most vulnerable in our society to guide our efforts. It is in this spirit, that we raise these demands, and invite psychologists and mental health professionals to join us in National Day of Action for Healing and Liberation on Friday, June 26, 2020, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture. Please contact psysr.endmassincarceration@gmail.com<<mailto:psysr.endmassincarceration@gmail.com>> if you would like to be involved.

In solidarity and justice, Psychologists for Social Responsibility
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