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\*\*\*Press Release\*\*\*

## Lawmakers and Advocates call for the passage of the Child Trauma Response Act, A.7815/S.6225

*To assist the 2,363 children living in New York that have been traumatized by family separation and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) as a result of actions taken by the Federal Government of the United States of America under the "Zero Tolerance Policy".*

ALBANY, NY- On the steps of the Million Dollar Staircase in the State Capitol Building, legislators, advocacy groups, and activists called for the passage of the Child Trauma Response Act (CTRA), A.7815/S.6225.

Assembly Members Andrew Hevesi, Harvey Epstein, Ellen Jaffee, Catalina Cruz, Maritza Davila, Marcos Crespo, Aravella Simotas, Michael Blake, Yuh Line Niou, Dan Quart, Jose Rivera, Carmen De La Rosa, Pat Fahy, and Assistant Speaker Felix Ortiz, along with Senators Alessandra Biaggi and Brian Benjamin were joined by Prevent Child Abuse NY, Safe Passage Project, Safe Horizon, the New York Immigration Coalition, New York State Council of Churches, Catholic Charities, The Legal Aid Society, JCCA and the Legal Project to advocate for the CTRA. The CTRA aims to address trauma and hurdles faced by unaccompanied minors with no lawful immigration status in the United States, many of whom were separated from their families as a result of the Trump Administration's "Zero Tolerance" immigration policy. This bill calls for a range of services that aim to ensure the wellbeing of such children, who are now in the care of the State of New York. Specific services under the CTRA will include trauma-informed care, legal representation, healthcare, education, and language services, among others, all of which are critical to rectify the serious adversities and toxic stress experienced by this population.

The American Academy of Pediatrics states that, "highly stressful experiences, like family separation, can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture," and that

"prolonged exposure to serious stress – known as toxic stress – can carry lifelong consequences for children." The results for children who have experienced trauma, the toxic stress it produces, and their body's physiological response, may include learning difficulties, behavioral problems, difficulty regulating emotions and increased and potentially debilitating physical and mental health issues. The Zero Tolerance Policy intentionally inflicted trauma upon these children. New York State must lead on behalf of this vulnerable population and ensure that every effort is made to provide these children with the support they need in order to combat the trauma they have endured.

"We agree 'that the only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men and women to do nothing.' Thousands of children have been intentionally traumatized by the federal government of the United States of America" said **Assemblyman Andrew Hevesi, Chair of the Assembly Committee on Social Services**, "We will not sit idly by while that intentional trauma manifests into lifelong difficulties for these children, our communities, our state and our country. Traumatic separation from a parent is one Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE's) that causes toxic stress. Scientists have found that exposure to toxic stress and the resulting elevated levels of stress hormones damages the structure and function of a child's developing brain. Specifically, the persistently elevated levels of cortisol produce dramatic changes in the connectivity within the prefrontal cortex. The results for children who have experienced trauma can include learning difficulties, behavioral problems, difficulty regulating emotions and increased and potentially debilitating physical and mental health issues. The physical health implications (short-term) of trauma include: headaches, fatigue, irritability, emotional outbursts, and over and under eating. The long-term health consequences of trauma include increased risk of cardiovascular disease and other chronic health problems including asthma, obesity, cancer, heart disease, and autoimmune diseases. New York State has the responsibility to act in order to enable these children to recover from the trauma inflicted upon them by our federal government."

"Trump's devastating 'zero tolerance' policy that separated thousands of immigrant families at the border and displaced immigrant youth across the country, has created lasting trauma as a direct result of these actions. For the 2,363 children who are now sheltered in New York, as a state it is our duty to do everything in our power to protect them from enduring further harm. The purpose of this bill is to provide critical mental health and harm-reduction services to immigrant youth who have experienced trauma at the hands of federal immigration policies, and to continue to build support for immigrant New Yorkers at large while we demand justice at the national level," said **State Senator Alessandra Biaggi**.

**Senator Brian Benjamin** said, "Trump's policy of forced family separation has left a scar on our nation that we cannot heal, causing irreparable harm to the precious children taken from their families, including those brought here to New York State. It is a moral imperative that the state step in and provide needed support and restorative care to the children who have experienced this tremendous trauma. The comprehensive care this legislation provides will help put these children on the path to healing."

"Rather than be a bystander in the family separation crisis, we are stepping up to help right the wrongs perpetrated by the Trump administration with the introduction of Child Trauma

Response Act. We have a duty to protect children in our state that have been victimized and traumatized by the President's Zero Tolerance policy, which has been responsible for the separation of thousands of children from their families. By affording these children a host of services that include healthcare, education, and legal representation, New York can play its part in healing the scars caused by the Trump-led attack on immigrants," **said Assemblymember Harvey Epstein.**

"The number of children in New York State who are traumatized by family separation and suffering from toxic stress do not have time to wait for us to act. As Chair of the Committee on Children and Families and a co-sponsor of The Child Trauma Response Act, I call on my colleagues in the legislature to pass this bill and urge Governor Cuomo to sign it into law," said **Assemblywoman Ellen Jaffee.** "We in New York have a moral responsibility to be a national leader, to be an example of government that does right and good by making these children eligible for a range of appropriate services, supports, and protections which are beneficial to their health, safety and well-being."

"The trauma inflicted on migrant children separated from their families at our southern border is ongoing. With multiple facilities holding detained migrant children in The Bronx, this issue hits close to home. As a community of immigrants, New York must stand up and protect our most vulnerable," said **Assemblyman Michael Blake.**

"We know that the fight against the federal government's war on immigrants is far from over -- as long as the Trump Administration continues using rhetoric spreading fear and hate and pushes policies that separate families, we'll continue leading by example in New York where ensuring that families and children are protected," said **Assemblywoman Nily Rozic, Chair of the Assembly's Office of State-Federal Relations.** "I am hopeful that the Child Trauma Response Act will pass as we continue pushing back against a harmful Zero Tolerance policy that has only created more backlog and systemic challenges."

**Assistant Speaker Félix W. Ortiz** said, "These children are being separated from their parents in a foreign country, perhaps not even speaking the local language, creating a highly stressful situation for them. The mental and physical needs of these children must be addressed while they are in our care. New York must act in support of these children and against the Zero Tolerance policy of the Federal government."

"The actions of the Federal government have separated innocent children from families and caused tremendous trauma," said **Assemblymember Yuh-Line Niou,** "These children must have access to the full range of support systems and services our State can offer. By passing this bill, these children will have accessible assistance in navigating the bureaucracy of our State and safeguard the health, safety, and well-being of these unaccompanied minors. Going forward, we must continue to expand these services and guarantee that we are doing all we can for these vulnerable children who are currently overlooked by our government."

"The Trump administration's zero-tolerance immigration policy has resulted in the transfer of approximately 2,363 unaccompanied children to child care agencies and centers around New York State," said **Assemblymember Pat Fahy.** "Providing these children with basic health and safety

services, many of whom who came here through no fault or choice of their own and have been through traumatic experiences, is the right to do. I commend Assemblymember Hevesi for introducing this measure, as forced family separation has severe psychological and long-term effects on minors."

"This legislation takes a meaningful step towards comprehensively addressing the trauma experienced by immigrant children who are separated from their families at the border as a result of this administration's inhuman policies," said **Steve Choi, Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition**. "Until we can change federal policies impacting immigrant communities, New York State must take decisive steps to protect and stabilize young people who have experienced unspeakable horrors as they fled violence and persecution at home, only to be confronted by the social, emotional, and physical agony of family separation."

**Tim Hathaway, Executive Director, PCANY** said "Toxic stress is harmful for any child, but for unaccompanied minors and those children separated from their parents at the Mexican border, the toxic stress and trauma they have experienced and continue to experience will have long-term consequences. The good news is that, while in the care of our State, we can provide them trauma-informed care. We fully support CTRA and look forward to seeing trauma-informed services implemented."

**Michael Polenberg, VP of Government Affairs, Safe Horizon** said, "Safe Horizon, the nation's largest victim services provider, commends Senator Alessandra Biaggi, Assembly Member Andrew Hevesi and their respective colleagues for recognizing the need for access to enhanced services, including trauma counseling and legal representation, for children cruelly separated from their parents due to federal immigration policies. At Safe Horizon's five Child Advocacy Centers in New York City, we provide an immediate, trauma-informed response to children who have experienced sexual or severe physical violence, and we know how the availability of immediate, victim-centered care can help bolster the healing process. And through the work of our Immigration Law Project, we recognize that expert legal representation can help provide a path to safety for individuals and families fleeing violence abroad. We urge the full Senate & Assembly to pass this important legislation and call on the Governor to sign it into law as quickly as possible."

**Julie Schwietert Collazo, Co-founder and director, Immigrant Families Together** said, "Since June 2018, Immigrant Families Together has worked to reunify children and adults separated by the Trump Administration's cruel zero tolerance policy. In addition to paying bond for detained adults and then advocating for the release of their children into their custody, our organization and volunteers provide ongoing support to the families impacted by zero tolerance. In the year since this policy was in force, we have seen the profound impact of trauma upon these families, especially the children. Anxiety, nightmares, fear of being apart from their parents, mistrust of others, regression in speech, toileting, and general academic and behavioral functioning -- these are all symptoms we have witnessed firsthand. Even though the zero tolerance policy ended officially, the trauma of family separation will last these families their entire lives. New Yorkers understand that we have a responsibility to do what we can to mitigate or repair the harm this destructive federal policy has wrought upon these families. The Child Trauma Response Act is an important part of taking concrete, positive action to do just that."

**Jim Purcell, CEO of the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies (COFCCA)** said, "We strongly support this effort to provide additional services and supports to unaccompanied minors and their family members or qualified sponsors. Many unaccompanied minors have come to the United States seeking asylum from horrific violence in their home countries, and were sent by their family; they experience a very challenging journey prior to crossing our country's border. We believe they would benefit greatly from increased access to support services following their reunification with sponsors, and we applaud the Legislature's commitment to meeting the needs of these families and welcoming immigrants to New York State."

**Rich Leimsider, Executive Director, Safe Passage Project** said, "Safe Passage Project provides free lawyers to more than 900 child refugees who are being deported from New York State. As the largest provider of such services, we know that without an attorney, most of these young people will lose their cases - but with an attorney by their side, more than 90% will succeed. And we know that there are thousands more of New York's children who need support. Safe Passage Project is deeply encouraged by the leadership of Assemblyman Hevesi and Senator Biaggi in seeking to address this crisis."

**Ronald E. Richter, Chief Executive Officer, JCCA** said, "JCCA unequivocally supports the Child Trauma Response Act (A.7815/S.6225), which would provide social services and trauma-informed care to young refugees who have fled dangerous situations and experienced unimaginable trauma. Unaccompanied minors who are discharged to sponsors need tremendous support as they adjust to life in the United States—and their sponsors need help too. We have a moral duty to ensure the safety and well-being of these brave young people who have risked everything to achieve the American dream and JCCA is grateful to Assemblyman Hevesi and Senator Biaggi for sponsoring this bill."

"Children that experience family separation and other adverse experiences endure significant levels of toxic stress that can compromise their health and development. We must do all we can to provide the necessary resources and supports to meet their needs" said **Jennifer March, Executive Director of Citizens' Committee for Children of New York.**

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