



San Diego Rapid Response Network Migrant Shelter Services | Advocacy

The following is an excerpt from Jewish Family Service of San Diego's upcoming white paper on San Diego Rapid Response Network Migrant Shelter Services. The full white paper will be linked here when available, as well as published on www.rapidresponsesd.org and www.jfssd.org.

Jewish Family Service of San Diego (JFSSD) is a legal and humanitarian services provider that has been dedicated to working on behalf of immigrants since 1918. Since 2018, the organization has witnessed numerous issues for individuals seeking asylum, and actively advocates for the rights, dignity and respect all asylum seekers deserve. This includes working with all levels of government to ensure the continuation of San Diego Response Network (SDRRN) Migrant Shelter Services, as well as taking action through lawsuits and administrative complaint filings regarding specific immigration/asylum-related issues and impacted individuals. JFSSD also regularly distributes media statements relating to the issues that impacts their ability to do this work.

These efforts have resulted in greater awareness of critical issues and policy changes, along with advocacy work and shelter tours with elected leaders and political pundits on both sides of the aisle.

Shelter Advocacy

Advocacy remains vital to ensuring the continued operations of the shelter. In the first few months of the shelter's existence, this advocacy included raising awareness of migrant families being abandoned on San Diego's streets through multiple press conferences and media interviews urging elected leaders at the City, County, State and federal levels to step up and develop a sustainable plan to address the issue.

After a fact-finding visit in November 2018, then Governor-Elect Gavin Newsom acknowledged the urgent need for greater, broader humanitarian response, saying, "We can't do everything ourselves, but I know that we are capable of doing more. This community needs to do more, the County of San Diego needs to do more, Imperial County needs to do more, and the State of California needs to do more to support the county and city efforts, because with all due respect, we're not."

JFSSD and SDRRN have recommended actions including: flexible rapid response funds allocated from general state and/or local funds to respond to surges in migrant arrivals at the San Diego/Tijuana border region; funding to cover travel expenses, health services and general operating support for the emergency shelter; humanitarian aid; and more temporary and long-term housing solutions for processed migrant families.

Eventually, these calls for support resulted in the San Diego County Board of Supervisors' approval to lease a County-owned facility to JFSSD to serve as a temporary congregate shelter site in December 2019.

JFSSD's ongoing advocacy and conversations with State leaders helped secure \$9.2 million in funding from the State of California to support shelter operations through June 2020, and then \$6.2 million designated to support SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services from the State's Rapid Response Fund in February 2021. JFSSD was also able to secure significant funding from the FEMA Emergency Food & Shelter Program (EFSP) and has engaged in [advocacy regarding its replacement program](#) known as the Customs Border Protection – Shelter & Services Program (forthcoming).

In partnership with the Women's Refugee Commission, JFSSD engaged in national policy advocacy on what it looks like to welcome with dignity through a public-private partnership model. This effort resulted in "Welcoming People Seeking Safety: A San Diego Blueprint for Humanitarian Reception," an [advocacy brief](#) published in February 2023.

Locally, JFSSD has voiced its support of the County of San Diego's efforts to create a response plan that ensures asylum seekers and refugees are treated with dignity and have access to the resources they need, the establishment of a County Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs and more.

Even with this support, however, JFSSD has invested and stretched its resources, with increased numbers of arrivals often testing the system's ability to serve vulnerable individuals. As such JFSSD continues to call on all levels of government to prioritize rebuilding our country's broken asylum and immigration systems, including improved processes for migrant shelter services across the border region.

Legal Advocacy

Through its shelter and legal services work, JFSSD has witnessed or heard firsthand accounts of countless incidents of mistreatment and injustice toward asylum seekers. The last several years have also been plagued by inhumane policy changes that have only further exacerbated these issues. As a result, JFSSD has become increasingly more vocal in its opposition of these policies by [testifying to the U.S. Congress](#), providing comment for the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), participating in national lawsuits and filing numerous complaints alongside partner organizations. These include:

Complaint Filings on Mistreatment of Pregnant People:

- In April 2020, the ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial Counties and JFSSD filed an administrative complaint with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (DHS OIG) for an immediate investigation of the U.S. Border Patrol's treatment of a 27-year-old Guatemalan woman who gave birth at the Chula Vista Border Patrol Station under harsh conditions that placed her and her baby at unnecessary risk.
- In November 2021, members of Congress led by Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut sent a letter to DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas demanding policy changes to prevent the detention of pregnant people in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) custody. Shortly after the letter, CBP issued an updated policy regarding the treatment of pregnant, postpartum, nursing individuals and infants in custody, but the Congressional group found the policy to fall significantly short of the guidance needed to properly serve these groups.

- In May 2022, CBP established a new policy governing the processing of newborns born in the U.S. and their immediate family members, which included the use of mobile processing to limit the need for these individuals to be returned to a CPB facility following a hospital discharge, or if a return to a facility is necessary, guidance to prioritize the processing of the individuals.
- In October 2022, ACLU, ACLU of San Diego & Imperial Counties, ACLU of Texas, JFSSD, and the Center for Immigration Law and Policy (CILP) at the UCLA School of Law, along with 83 advocacy organizations and 51 medical professionals, sent a letter to CBP Commissioner Chris Magnus demanding CBP uphold the reproductive rights of migrants. Specifically, the letter urges CBP to strictly limit its detention of pregnant, postpartum, nursing persons, and their families, to the minimum time period necessary to process them for release to their networks of care in the United States.
- In April 2023, spurred by CBP's lack of response, JFSSD and the lead organizations renewed their call demanding the protection of reproductive rights of migrants with another letter signed by 180 individuals and organizations and detailing new cases of mistreatment.

Complaint Filings on Family Separation

- In July 2021, ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial Counties and JFSSD sent a letter to DHS Secretary Mayorkas calling on him to direct border agents to stop separating families seeking asylum at the U.S. border with Mexico. The letter highlighted ongoing family separations which were collected from guests coming through the SDRRN Migrant Shelter, including in less traditional family units, and proposed concrete solutions to end the practice.
- In August 2022, ACLU of San Diego & Imperial Counties, JFSSD and UCLA Center for Immigration Law and Policy sent a letter to Mayorkas to seek accountability for a mother separated from her children, while reinforcing previous calls for Mayorkas to direct border officials to stop separating families seeking asylum in the U.S. at the southern border.

Lawsuit Regarding Migrant Protection Protocols and Legal Representation (*Immigrant Defenders Law Center, et al. v. Mayorkas*):

- JFSSD became an organizational plaintiff in *Immigrant Defenders Law Center, et al. v. Mayorkas*. The lawsuit was filed in October 2020 by six asylum-seeking individuals subjected to Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP, aka "Remain in Mexico"), alongside Immigrant Defenders Law Center and JFSSD. The lawsuit demanded that asylum seekers enrolled in MPP who expressed a fear of being returned to Mexico be given access to their lawyers while awaiting critical interviews in CBP custody.

In March 2023, a federal court largely denied the Biden Administration's motion to dismiss the lawsuit. In its decision, the court declared that, if true, the Plaintiffs' allegations would amount to "acute and sweeping violations" of their "bedrock rights." The court also granted

the Plaintiffs' motion for class certification, meaning they will be permitted to represent a larger class of similarly situated individuals who had their cases terminated or received final removal orders under the original incarnation of the policy during the Trump administration.

U.S. Citizen Newborn Complaint Filing

- In July 2020, JFSSD and ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial Counties filed a joint complaint to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General for expelling a two-day old newborn U.S. citizen from the country and forcing him to return to Mexico with his mother and family, who were seeking asylum.

Humanitarian Parole Review Complaint Filing

- In November 2021, the ACLU Foundation of San Diego & Imperial Counties, JFSSD, Immigrant Defenders Law Center, Transgender Law Center and Al Otro Lado filed an administrative complaint asking the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General to investigate and recommend practices addressing CBP's refusal to adjudicate in a timely manner urgent applications for humanitarian parole.

Qualitative Research

Through the course of its work, SDRRN has partnered with key researchers and research institutions to provide concrete data and insight into respite shelter operations. The resulting reports have become important advocacy tools to detail on-the-ground operations, individuals assisted, asylum and reception processes, and critical needs. Reports include:

- Wong, Tom K., Sebastian Bonilla, and Anna Colemana. 2019. *Seeking Asylum: Part 1*. La Jolla, CA: U.S. Immigration Policy Center (USIPC) at UC San Diego. Available [here](#)

Media Statements

JFSSD consistently responds to immigration-related policy changes and reports of inhumane treatment of migrants through the distribution of media statements, either from the organization individually or together with its SDRRN and CAWTF partners. Statements have included JFSSD's opposition to policies such as [MPP, Title 42](#), and [family detentions](#), as well as asylum and travel bans enacted by both the Trump and Biden Administrations.

These statements continue to position JFSSD as a values-driven, boots-on-the-ground leader in calling for all levels of government to assist in the humane welcoming of asylum seekers, while also demanding the federal government rebuild the nation's immigration system, focusing on the compassionate treatment of migrants. Depending on the situation/issue at hand, these statements will be distributed proactively, targeting key immigration and policy-focused writers, or reactively upon the request for comment from an inquiring media outlet.

JFSSD's statements have been published – either in part or in their entirety – by print, digital and broadcast news outlets across the country and beyond. The use of media statements, rather than scheduling one-off interviews, greatly reduces impact on JFSSD shelter/immigration staff, allowing them to focus on their critical daily work serving vulnerable migrants.

These statements can be found by visiting jfssd.org/pressroom. For additional information on how JFSSD's media strategy impacts its advocacy efforts, see "Narrative Work/Public Relations."