

**“A Message from the Inspector General: Review of the Department of Justice’s Planning and Implementation of Its Zero Tolerance Policy and Its Coordination with the Departments of Homeland Security and Health and Human Services,” January 2021**

Hello, I’m Michael Horowitz, Inspector General for the U.S. Department of Justice. Today, my office released a report that found that the Department’s leadership failed to effectively prepare for and manage the implementation of its zero tolerance policy for immigration offenses on the Southwest border.

Then Attorney General Sessions issued the zero tolerance policy in April 2018. Our review found that, after issuing the policy, AG Sessions encouraged the Department of Homeland Security, or DHS, to begin referring to the Justice Department for criminal prosecution adults who entered the country illegally with children. We further found that he did so with the knowledge that such referrals would result in the separation of parents from their children. On May 4, DHS began separating families by referring accompanied adults to the Justice Department for criminal prosecution. We concluded that the Department’s advocacy for this change in DHS policy was a driving force in DHS’s decision. We further found that Justice Department officials significantly underestimated the complexity and legal requirements related to the care and custody of separated children.

We also found that DOJ leaders were aware of many potential challenges prior to issuing the zero tolerance policy, but failed to attempt to address them until after the policy was issued. Further, Justice Department leadership did not begin to coordinate with the Southwest border U.S. Attorneys, the U.S. Marshal Service, the Department of Health and Human Services, or the federal courts until after the policy was issued.

Between May and June 2018, over 3,000 children were separated, and the government has identified ongoing challenges related to the reunification of some of these children with their families.

We concluded that the Department’s single-minded focus on increasing immigration prosecutions came at the expense of careful consideration of the impact family separations would have on the children, and the government’s ability to later reunite the children with their families.

To read the report and all of our findings, visit our website, [oig.justice.gov](http://oig.justice.gov) or go to [oversight.gov](http://oversight.gov). Thank you for joining me today.

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