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by Catholic News Service

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The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, the Southern Poverty Law Center and other organizations have joined in a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of the more than 10,000 children currently being held by the Trump administration in detention centers across the country.

The suit, originally filed last August in federal court on behalf of a group of youth being held in Virginia and their sponsors, claims that an "alarming number of children continue be held for long periods of time" and the situation is now at a crisis level, according to a news release from CLINIC.

The suit charges that the situation is primarily the result of "a deliberate policy to deter Central Americans from traveling to the U.S. and an ongoing partnership between the Office of Refugee Resettlement and Immigration and Customs Enforcement."

A request for comment sent by Catholic News Service to ORR was not immediately answered.

"ORR is ignoring the law established by Congress by detaining rather than releasing the children to their loved ones," Jeanne Atkinson, CLINIC's executive director, said in a Jan. 22 statement. "We cannot allow this administration to continue to intentionally keep children away from their families, it is immoral and inhumane."

The Southern Poverty Law Center, based in Alabama, filed the lawsuit in conjunction with the Legal Aid Justice Center, based in Virginia, and the firm Sterne, Kessler, Goldstein & Fox. CLINIC said it has joined the suit as an organizational plaintiff "on an amended complaint." The Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, based in Washington state, also is a plaintiff.

The lawsuit asserts that "ongoing collaboration" between ORR and ICE "has led to the prolonged detention of these children." It cited a 2017 memo leaked Jan. 17, 2019, that the plaintiffs said "showed the administration intended the very result this policy has caused: the prolonged detention of children and serving as a deterrent to migrants who want to travel to the United States."

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