July 2, 2019

The Honorable Kevin K. McAleenan
Acting Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

RE: The health of migrant individuals and families at U.S. Customs and Border Protection centers

Dear Acting Secretary McAleenan,

In light of the recent reports from members of Congress and the press detailing the health and safety risks that immigrants are exposed to while attempting to enter the United States, the American Academy of Nursing (Academy) expresses its extreme concern to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) regarding the conditions and treatment of these individuals, families, and children. The Academy’s fellows consist of 2,600 of the nation’s most accomplished nurse leaders in education, management, practice, policy, and research. These fellows are committed to promoting the health, safety, and human rights of our nation’s immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees.

As you know, Congress recently passed and the President signed an emergency funding bill that provides humanitarian assistance and security to migrants entering the United States at the southern border. Now that this funding is authorized, it is critical the US, DHS, and CBP uphold humanitarian principles and take quick actions to ensure all immigrants detained at the border have access to basic hygiene needs, appropriate health care, including mental health care services, and adequate sleeping arrangements.

Many of those crossing the border are fleeing stressful and traumatic situations including extreme poverty, war, and gang as well as domestic violence. Completing their dangerous journey to the United States should be the end to their suffering. However, many of these children are now further exposed to adverse childhood experiences, which result in toxic stress, by the indefinite uncertainty and instability of their detention. The Academy has published numerous briefs on the long-term health consequences immigrant and asylum-seeking children face and cannot condone the current policies in practice at the border.1,2 Transparency, due process, and access to appropriate health services are necessary for all children, families, and individuals seeking refuge, safety, and asylum in the United States.

While the Academy is aware that many are working to provide care to the migrants detained, more must be done to provide comprehensive health services, reunify families, and cease harmful policies. We call on the Administration to take immediate actions to improve and end the long-term physical and

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mental health complications that have occurred for this vulnerable population in a meaningful way. We stand ready to discuss this humanitarian crisis further and to contribute nursing expertise on this vital topic. If you have any questions, please contact Suzanne Miyamoto, Chief Executive Officer, at 202-777-1167 or smiyamoto@aannet.org.

Sincerely,

Karen Cox, PhD, RN, FACHE, FAAN
President