

IMMIGRATION

Lawyers Still Can't Find Parents Of 545 Children Taken By The Trump Administration

It's an October non-surprise.

By LORELEI LAIRD

at 11:16 AM



(Photo by Drew Angerer/Getty Images)

Remember, about 100 subjective years ago, the summer of 2018? That June, public outrage against the Trump administration's family separation policy was so intense that it forced Donald Trump to write an executive order [pretending](#) to stop it. The lead lawsuit on that issue, *Ms. L v. ICE*, forced the administration to start accounting for the separated families in a way that [we now know](#) they hadn't even bothered with on their own.

[Linking](#) from *Ms. L* this week tells us that there are still 545 separated children in the United States whose parents the lawyers involved can't find.



rewind a bit. *Ms. L* was actually settled about two years ago (along with two related after the ACLU forced the Trump administration to admit in court that asylum-seekers have due process rights even if their skin isn't white. But originally, that order applied to families separated in 2018, when the Trump administration ([except Kirstjen Nielsen](#)) was admitting it was separating families. They also had a "pilot program" for this in 2017, which affected 1,556 families, and the ACLU eventually got the settlement expanded to include those families.

The 545 missing parents come from that group. The bulk of those — 470 — has been designated as unreachable by phone, which could be ordinary federal recalcitrance, but may also reflect how much poverty there probably is in this group. (Rich people don't immigrate by walking 1,500 miles to south Texas and then throwing themselves on CBP's mercy; they buy themselves investor or "[genius](#)" visas.) To find them, the steering committee has enlisted organizations with people on the ground in Central America.

That effort had some success — and then came the novel coronavirus. The Trump administration cannot be blamed for the virus itself, but I can't help noticing that it wouldn't be an issue if the families had been either deported together or permitted to go through the asylum process together.

By the way, that 545 number doesn't mean that about 1,000 families have already been reunited. The filing says the steering committee has reached families of 485 kids, who then decide whether to reunite or have the child stay in the United States. (Staying might be a good choice if there's a competent relative in the U.S., and the home country is still dangerous. Recall that these were mostly asylum-seekers fleeing unchecked violence in Central America.) The government has not provided a phone number for 104 of the families.

But the bulk of this group, 422 kids, has not been reunited because the government disputes that they even belong on this list in the first place. It's hard to imagine a lawyer making that argument and being able to live with themselves. However, if the Trump administration has

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*i Laird is a freelance writer specializing in the law, and the only person you know
ill has an “I Believe Anita Hill” bumper sticker. Find her at wordofthelaird.com.*



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