

IMMIGRATION

Judge ‘Disturbed’ That Feds Withheld Contact Information For Separated Parents

Naturally, this was disclosed the day before Thanksgiving.

By LORELEI LAIRD

at 11:46 AM



(Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

In the news business, the day before a holiday or a weekend is known as a dumping ground for bad news. If you don't want something noticed, you generally release it on Friday around 5 p.m. If it's right before a long, routine-disrupting weekend, even better.

So perhaps it was inevitable that, on the day before Thanksgiving, we'd learn more about the children the Trump administration stole from their parents. In [a December 2 joint status report](#) filed in [Ms. L v. ICE](#), the lead case on family separation, we learn that the federal government has found previously undisclosed contact information for some of the parents of the 628 children who are still separated from their parents.

determine the full scope or usefulness of this new information.”

ACLU attorney Lee Gelernt later said that the new information includes phone numbers never before provided to the Joint Steering Committee. That committee, made up of multiple nonprofits plus the law firm Paul Weiss, has been trying for at least two years to locate the parents.

The contact information comes from a database belonging to the Executive Office for Immigration Review, the DOJ subagency that runs the immigration courts. The Steering Committee has also received parental contact information from other branches of the government, as well as at least one government contractor that works with affected families. The information is all over the place because, as the [DHS](#) and [HHS](#) inspectors general have both observed, the government did not bother preparing for this. It’s almost as if the cruelty was the point!

This news missed me and probably most other pie-logged Americans. It did not miss Judge Dana Makoto Sabraw, who ([according to public radio station KQED](#)) ordered the federal government to explain “what happened and why” in writing by January 13. [Sabraw called](#) the late disclosure “disturbing in that it does seem to be readily available information.”

Gelernt thinks the disclosure may be related to the fact that family separation came up in the third and final presidential debate in late October. After that high-profile reminder that the issue still exists, he told news outlets, the government said it might have more information about the separated parents. That’s what led up to the November 25 disclosure.

He thinks there may be more, and indeed, DOJ attorney Sarah Fabian says there will be. But don’t worry, you guys; Fabian says nobody was withholding information on purpose! She told the judge the problem is that her team did not understand the processes around the Steering Committee’s searches, and apparently didn’t think to check the databases at every involved agency.

“I don’t believe there was a neglectful or nefarious intent,” Courthouse News quotes Fabian as saying. “We were focusing on the databases in front of us.”

DOJ a wholly owned subsidiary of Trumpistan, and I'd guess Fabian and her colleagues have to do some ridiculous things to make the big boss happy. Remember, this is the same woman who [argued before the Ninth Circuit](#) that children in federal custody are not entitled to soap or beds. In this case, she only has to pretend to be dumb, not evil, which might actually come as a relief.

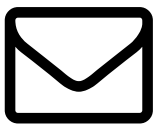
To her, that is. The 628 children who are growing up without their parents or their cultures — and possibly without anybody who loves them — might not feel very sympathetic.

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



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