

County supervisors call on federal government to end child separations

By Anne Ternus-Bellamy

WOODLAND — Yolo County supervisors passed a resolution on Tuesday calling on the federal government to end the separation of children from their parents at the border.

The resolution was passed on a 3-2 vote with Supervisors Jim Provenza and Don Saylor of Davis and Oscar Villegas of West Sacramento (all Democrats) voting in favor and Supervisors Matt Rexroad of Woodland and Duane Chamberlain of the rural 5th district (both Republicans) voting against it.

Back in March 2017, the board unanimously passed another resolution, “Yolo County, a Safe and Welcoming Place for All,” which affirmed the county’s commitment to be a safe, tolerant and welcoming place and pledged to monitor and take appropriate action to ensure family unity, community security, respect, due process and support of all individuals.

That resolution was passed in the early months of the Trump administration when, as Saylor said at the time, the national climate had “caused residents of Yolo County a heightened level of fear, concern, uncertainty and confusion related to the treatment of those perceived as noncitizens” as well as “recent acts of vandalism and acts of violence affecting community members (which) have created a climate of fear and intimidation.”

The 2017 resolution committed the county to protecting the privacy of residents who may be adversely affected by attempts to collect identity information; to providing essential services to all county residents as allowed by the law; to taking appropriate action to ensure family unity, community security, respect, due process and support for all residents; and to promoting the health and safety of residents through professional interactions by law enforcement without regard to immigration status.

Tuesday’s resolution expanded on that, stating “the Yolo County Board of Supervisors opposes current practices that separate children and parents/adults, calls for an immediate end to the separation of children and families” and pledges to advocate to that end locally.

Action items included legislative advocacy and examining whether additional county resources should be spent to support Yolo County residents with legal issues related to immigration.

In explaining his opposition, Chamberlain said he had a problem with the use of the word “all” in the phrase “safe and welcoming place ... for all individuals.”

“Does that mean we welcome criminals?” Chamberlain asked. “‘All’ means everybody. C’mon man ... I don’t want to welcome all people to Yolo County.”

However, Chamberlain did vote in favor of the March 2017 resolution which used the same language.

Rexroad also voted for the first resolution but not the one passed Tuesday.

“I really don’t think that this resolution does anything. I don’t think the resolution we adopted in March of 2017 does anything either,” Rexroad said.

“I understand that people think this is really consequential but there’s no money behind it. If you want to look at the values of an organization, look where they put their resources and we don’t have any resources behind this at all.

“I understand this is part of the Davis political culture to bring these things forward and pass resolutions and everyone feels good about it, but this isn’t accomplishing a lot,” Rexroad said.

“I generally agree with the spirit of this,” he added, but it is a “dog-and-pony show ... where we can all feel good about it and we don’t do anything about it going forward.”

Saylor and Provenza, who brought the resolution to the board, disagreed, saying current actions by the Trump administration are so reprehensible that everybody needs to speak out.

Noting the 3,000 children separated from their families, some of whom may never be reunited, Provenza said, “to me this is honestly the worst thing (I’ve) ever seen, to see our country treat children this way.

“As a county with a strong immigrant community we have a moral responsibility to stand up against such a wrong,” he added.

“One of the things we know for a fact, since there’s been so much scientific research, is that taking children away from parents, especially at a young age, and we’re talking about children as young as 18 months or even younger, ripped from their parents’ arms with no indication of when or if they’ll see their parents again, does permanent psychological damage in a way that can affect the child for the rest of their life,” said Provenza.

Said Saylor: “I have a granddaughter who’s 3 years old, another one who is 4 months old, and I know separating those two children from their parents would be unbearable and it would be a life-changing trauma for a child that age.”

“Families are being separated and have no path, no information even, on how to proceed. What we’re asking to do is make a statement, but beyond making a statement, to explore ways that we can help here locally.”

Actions the resolution commits the county to include submitting a letter to the current administration and local representatives voicing the county’s objection to the separation of families and incarceration of children; advocating in its legislative platform for sensible immigration policies; calling on interfaith leaders in the county to create a forum on immigration issues; and examining legal resources to support county residents with immigration issue.

And speaking out does matter, Provenza said.

“Sometimes when something bad is happening, everybody needs to speak up. And sure ... one county board of supervisors isn’t going to change it, but together, many boards of supervisors, many individuals... can effect change. That’s really the only way it works.

“I saw a press account of a 1-year-old baby in an immigration hearing and the state had an attorney there and the baby didn’t have an attorney,” Provenza said. “It is so outrageous. It’s beyond a violation of due process ... it’s a Kafkaesque nightmare and we’ve got to speak up about this.”

— *Reach Anne Ternus-Bellamy at aternus@davisenterprise.net. Follow her on Twitter at [@ATernusBellamy](https://twitter.com/ATernusBellamy).*