

Family detention hits a snag

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Early last summer, the Obama administration opened a detention center in the remote town of Artesia, New Mexico, in order to detain Central American women who cross the southern border with their children. The facility was a centerpiece of the administration's policy of family detention, which aims to "send a message," as Department of Homeland Security secretary Jeh Johnson said, that asylum seekers from these countries are not welcome. Federal officials closed the Artesia detention center in December. But this was only because they had opened a 2,400-bed facility in Dilley, Texas, where they planned to detain large numbers of women and children by this summer.

The *Century* [decried](#) family detention in our most recent editorial. In the *New York Times Magazine*, Wil Hylton [called](#) the practice a national shame.

Now the government's plans have reached at least a temporary halt. A federal judge announced his [decision](#) last week to grant an injunction preventing the administration from continuing its practice of locking up women and children who cross the border.

The ACLU filed a lawsuit against DHS on behalf of the hundreds of women and children who had been detained since last summer and had passed a "credible fear interview"—the first step toward asylum. Judge James Boasberg rejected the government's argument that these women and children represented a blanket "national security threat" and said that the government had to treat their cases individually. Boasberg ruled that the policy is "likely unlawful": one person cannot be deprived of liberty, he wrote, in order to send a message to another person.

While the impact is not yet clear, this is at least one strike for humanity and sanity. The saga will no doubt continue. Another hearing is scheduled for March 6.