



August 7, 2018

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
328 Hart Senate Office
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson,

The National Coalition for History (NCH) is a consortium of over 50 organizations that advocates on federal legislative and regulatory issues. The coalition is made up of diverse groups representing historians, archivists, teachers, students, political scientists, museum professionals, genealogists and other stakeholders.

The *New York Times* ([“Trump Administration in Chaotic Scramble to Reunify Migrant Families”](#)) recently reported on the apparent disappearance and/or destruction of records by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) linking children to their parents separated by the Trump administration’s “zero tolerance” immigration policy. As a result of the *New York Times* article, [the National Archives and Records Administration recently sent a letter to U.S. Customs and Border Protection \(CBP\)](#) seeking what “action CBP will take to address these allegations.”

This major breakdown in records and information management practices is a potential violation of the Federal Records Act (FRA). Agencies must create accurate, usable, and readily accessible records to ensure individual rights and government transparency. Although the National Archives and Records Administration is mandated to assist agencies in the records management process, it has limited authority and resources to require proper management of agency records.

Incidents such as this remind us that the inappropriate loss or destruction of public records reverberates through time. Years from now, these children or their children will want to discover how they came to America. Historians and policy-makers will want to understand what happened in this complex chapter of American immigration history. Future scholars will want to accurately portray the history of the Trump presidency. Inspecting original documents is the only hope we have of getting close to historical accuracy; without these documents and the rigorous methods of professional historians, we descend into pure—and often partisan—speculation.

This matter presents a timely (and immediate!) opportunity for Congress to exercise its oversight responsibility in ensuring that federal agencies are held accountable for their responsibilities under the FRA. Such oversight is overdue. Neither the House nor the Senate committees with jurisdiction over NARA have held an oversight hearing in a decade.

The National Coalition for History strongly urges Congress to focus on strengthening requirements for agencies to effectively document and manage the conduct of business, including enforcement of sanctions on agencies failing to do so. The American people deserve—and we demand—a government that is committed to maintaining accurate, effectively managed, and appropriately accessible information documenting our fundamental rights and interests.

Please contact NCH's executive director Lee White at lwhite@historycoalition.org if you wish to discuss this issue further. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Kraut". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Alan Kraut, Ph.D.
President