

# Protesters rally in Salt Lake against US immigration policy

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## 5PM: Protesters rally in Salt Lake against US immigration policy



SALT LAKE CITY — About 50 people rallied outside the U.S. Attorney's Office downtown Friday afternoon, protesting a new "zero tolerance" immigration policy that separates families trying to cross the southwest border.

"Today, nearly 200 rallies across the nation are coming together," María del Mar Gonzáles, a community outreach fellow for ACLU Utah, said to the crowd over a loudspeaker. "Today, this is the moment of movement."

In May, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced those entering the country illegally will be prosecuted criminally, rather than civilly like in previous years, in an attempt to dissuade Central American families from traveling to the border. If a mother and father are apprehended for illegal entry, any minor with them will be separated. Children cannot stay with a parent during the criminal court process.

Reports that 658 children have been separated from their parents between May 6 and May 19 — according to a Customs and Border Protection [official's report](#) to lawmakers — stirred debate on the policy that opponents say needlessly harms children.

ACLU Utah primarily organized the Salt Lake rally along with other nationwide protests of the Trump administration's new policy.

Local organizations such as Alliance for a Better Utah and Mormon Women for Ethical Government participated in the event as well.

"We are very family oriented," said Veronika Tait, an adjunct professor at Utah Valley University, who spoke on behalf of Mormon Women for Ethical Government. "We believe in eternal families and we believe families should be together now."

While Utah has not been directly affected by this issue, John Mejía, the legal director for ACLU Utah, says the rally was about sending a message.

"A lot of these prosecutions are happening at the border, so they're not necessarily taking place here," Mejía said. "But I think it's important U.S. attorneys, in general, stop their complicity in this zero tolerance policy that's going on."

John Huber, the U.S. Attorney for the District of Utah, in a statement reaffirmed the district's commitment to the policy.

"In addition to restoring legality along the border, the zero tolerance approach to illegal entry prosecutions is vital to protecting our nation and its citizens," Huber's statement said. "There is no department policy to separate families at the border. However, as is the case with any criminal prosecution and detention, children cannot be placed in a detention facility with their parent."

Melarie Wheat and three her sons, Camden, 4, Lincoln, 1, and Micah, 6, were in attendance at the rally.

"When I think of these kids, I think of my own kids," Wheat said. "I see, when I drop them off at a babysitter, they're sad. And these kids are being torn away from their parents for months."

Starting at noon, a range of community activists spoke to the crowd on the downtown sidewalk outside the U.S. attorney's office building.

"Immigrants ... are somebody," the crowd was led to chant, "and they deserve ... to stay together."

Ciriac Alvarez, an immigration rights activist who has been featured in [The New York Times](#), led some of these chants and called on participants to do more.

"My name is Ciriac Alvarez and I am undocumented and unafraid," Alvarez said. "And we all have a responsibility today than more than just show up at rallies — to demand accountability from our representatives and our senators."

