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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AGPA PUBLIC STATEMENT ON RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH IN TREATMENT

NEW YORK, February 24, 2020— In response to recent revelations regarding the practice of the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) sharing confidential psychotherapy notes with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for the purpose of denying asylum claims, the American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) would like to make the following statement.

Recent reporting by Hannah Dreier in the *Washington Post* documented therapists at facilities run by ORR sharing with ICE confidential clinical information from mandated therapy sessions provided to minor children in care. Following new federal mandates, this privileged information is routinely being disclosed to federal authorities and subsequently being used against these minors in proceedings that result in detaining them in long-term maximum security detention settings and/or denying their asylum claims. Refugees and asylum seekers flee to the United States out of desperate situations that have caused them grave harm, and their deportation can result in placing them back in danger or, in some cases, their death. While these new routine practices are technically legal (because ORR acts *in locos parentis*), they are inhumane and unethical.

AGPA is a professional organization comprised of colleagues from a number of clinical disciplines who are united by their belief in the power of group therapy for creating emotional safety and healing the wounds of those who have been isolated, traumatized, and excluded. Despite diverse theoretical orientations, training, and approaches, group therapists are all guided by the same ethical principles; chief among these are beneficence and confidentiality. All mental health professionals, as part of their oath of practice, are required to take proactive action in order to reduce harm and to improve the lives of those they treat. Disclosures made by those who are wounded and seeking help should not be used to further harm them.

In concordance with the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Counseling Association, and many other professional organizations, we condemn the practices of ORR and ICE. Putting clinicians in the position of being interrogators is duplicitous and violates their ethical mandates. Offering mental health services to traumatized children as a way to legitimize detention or deportation is an act of atrocity.

We call on the Trump administration to immediately cease these acts of harm being carried out under the veil of national security. Young people who have had their trust violated in a therapy process meant to protect them should be provided a fair removal hearing in immigration court. Seeking asylum is not a crime, but instead a request for help.

We raise our voices on behalf of traumatized immigrant and refugee youth. Their lives matter.

This statement was developed by the AGPA Community Outreach Task Force, chaired by Craig Haen and Suzanne Phillips, which is charged with establishing and executing community outreach programs to provide professional assistance to diverse group populations in the aftermath of traumatic events, in collaboration with the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Task Force, chaired by Sophia Aguirre and Wendy Freedman.

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About AGPA

The American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA) is the foremost professional association dedicated to the field of group psychotherapy, operating through a tri-partite structure: AGPA, a professional and educational organization; the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health, its philanthropic arm; and the International Board for Certification of Group Psychotherapists, a standard setting and certifying body. AGPA represents over 2,000 mental health professional members including psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers, as well as mental health, family, and pastoral counselors, many of whom have been recognized as specialists through the Certified Group Psychotherapist credential. Its members are experienced mental health professionals who lead psychotherapy groups and various non-clinical groups. Many are organizational specialists who work with businesses, not-for-profit organizations, communities and other "natural" groups to help them improve their functioning. The association also has 21 local and regional societies located across the country.

AGPA is committed to supporting the dignity and psychological safety of every individual without discrimination regarding race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sex, age, or disability. Central to our mission is a belief in the power of groups to treat mental illness, heal the scars from traumatic events, and enhance the well-being of adults and children in their families, schools, corporate settings, and communities.

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