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Congressional Hispanic Caucus Chairman Rep. Raul Ruiz, D-California, accompanied by from left, Rep. Darren Soto, D-Florida, Rep. Tony Cardenas, D-California, Rep. Nanette Barragan, D-California, Rep. Adriano Espaillat, D-New York, and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez, D-New Mexico, speaks to members of the media following a meeting with President Joe Biden at the White House in Washington on April 25. (AP/Andrew Harnik)

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Rep. [Adriano Espaillat](#) of New York, the nation's lone Black Catholic congressperson, has spoken out on [reports](#) that President Joe Biden may soon reinstate Trump-era family detention policies.

The formerly undocumented Afro-Dominican legislator issued [a statement](#) on March 7 calling the plans "a reversal of the progress that we have made since the previous administration."

"America is a nation of immigrants, and yet, our system to support immigrants and their families remains broken. ... As we work to address this crisis, we must move forward to implement solutions that treat families with humanity," he said.



Rep. Adriano Espaillat, D-New York (Wikimedia Commons/US House of Representatives)

"I encourage the administration to reconsider these actions and will continue my work with my Democratic colleagues to fight for meaningful immigration reform for asylum seekers and the families here in our nation."

Espaillat is one of several Democratic legislators reacting with shock to the new plan from Biden, who had indicated migrant family detention was not his current plan of action to address the increased amount of migrants making their way to the United States.

Various political and humanitarian crises in Latin America had driven their numbers at the southern border up to their highest in over two decades, according to data published in January from [Pew Research Center](#).

That same month, Biden [said](#) migrants from certain counties would be sent to Mexico if they arrived in the U.S. illegally. In February, the administration [announced](#) — like former president Donald Trump — that it would deny asylum to migrants who did not follow the proper processes before arriving stateside. These actions brought harsh [critique](#) from many of Biden's fellow Democrats, including Espaillat.

In addition, the Biden administration had previously continued the family detention policies of Trump and similar efforts under Barack Obama. In late 2021, however, Biden reportedly ceased migrant family detention amid upticks in the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adult migrants traveling alone were still subject to detention when crossing the border illegally.

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Roughly a year later, various Republican governors in southern border states began transporting incoming migrants from their cities to blue-leaning areas where support for immigration is strong — in an attempt to force Biden's hand. The new reports suggest the GOP may have gotten its way.

Throughout the back and forth, many Democrats in Congress have repeatedly stated their support for migrants struggling to make it to the U.S. border. One of the loudest groups pushing back has been the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, of which Espaillat is deputy chair.

The caucus met on March 7 with Homeland Security chief [Alejandro Mayorkas](#) to express disdain for Biden's recent moves on immigration and the report that family detention might reactivate. Espaillat later called the meeting "productive."





Migrants detained by U.S. Border Patrol agents after crossing into the United States from Mexico to request asylum get in a vehicle to be transferred to a detention center in El Paso Texas, Dec. 19, 2022. The Biden administration is weighing the reinstatement of a family detention policy for migrants who cross the U.S. border without legal authorization. (OSV News/Reuters/Jose Luis Gonzalez)

Meanwhile, the Biden administration itself has remained mum on the family detention report, with White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre refusing to confirm or deny what she called "rumors" about whether a policy reversal is truly incoming.

"I'm not saying it's being considered ... I'm not saying it is not," she [told](#) a press briefing on March 7.

Jean-Pierre also sought to distance the current Biden policies on immigration from those under Trump, a Republican who is currently seeking to return to the presidency with a run in the 2024 election.

"A lot of people have compared what the president is doing [to] what Trump did," she said. "That is not what is happening here."

**Editor's note:** This story was [originally published](#) at *Black Catholic Messenger*. It has been republished with permission.