

# Trump plans to 'extract' DNA from undocumented immigrants

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The US administration wants to allow Customs and Border Protection to collect genetic material from undocumented immigrants in government custody, according to a leaked draft policy.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) told BuzzFeed News - who broke the story - that they are 'working closely with the Department of Justice on a path forward for DNA collection'.

Voluntary DNA tests have been performed in migrant centres for over a year already in an attempt to reunite children with their families and identify fraudulent familial claims at the US-Mexican border (see BioNews 997). Issues were raised concerning what the genetic information may be used for after testing, and whether informed consent can be obtained, particularly from young children. The operation was considered a success, according to the DHS.

'[The programme] has identified dozens of cases in which children had no familial relation to the adults accompanying them. In the first operation - Operation Double Helix 1.0 - 16 out of 84 family units were identified as fraudulent based on negative DNA results. And in the second - Operation Double Helix 2.0 - 79 of 522 family units were identified as fraudulent based on negative DNA results, to date,' the DHS told Buzzfeed News.

However, this new draft is likely to provoke greater outrage regarding the civil liberties of the immigrants as the testing appears to be involuntary, and answers have still not been received regarding the use of the genetic information. Furthermore, the draft does not state that Immigration and Customs Enforcement will be prevented from accessing their results.

The DNA Fingerprint Act of 2005 allows federal agencies to collect DNA from any person in their custody. The Trump administration argues that testing would help officials at the border processing immigrants. They believe that the DNA results could be pooled into a nationwide database which can be accessed when looking for matches for potential previous criminal activity.

Many civil liberty groups argue that genetic material should only be obtained when trying to solve a specific crime.

‘It would, for the first time in this context, treat undocumented immigrants more like criminals in that DNA testing of this type is used only in a pure criminal context,’ said Jonathan Meyer, a former deputy general counsel at the DHS.

‘DNA testing is considered one of the more invasive actions that the government can take. You are obtaining a physical substance from a person’s body, with the potential to learn an almost infinite amount of information about the person.’

## SOURCES & REFERENCES

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The Week   <i>29 August 2019</i>
The Trump administration wants to start collecting DNA from unauthorized immigrants in federal custody
Business Insider   <i>29 August 2019</i>
The Trump Administration Wants To Start DNA Testing Undocumented Immigrants In Government Custody
BuzzFeed   <i>29 August 2019</i>

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