



The Impact of Deportation on Mental Health, Education Outcomes, and Economic Opportunity for Colorado Kids

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The Zaldivar Family: The 10 Year Battle

In May 2008, the Zaldivar family saw their world turn upside down. What started off as a process to apply for permanent U.S. residency for Jorge Zaldivar, ultimately turned into a 10-year-long battle against deportation. After Jorge was denied re-entry into the United States, his wife Christina found herself a single mother of three (with one on the way), a full-time employee, and a wife whose husband was thousands of miles away. After realizing he could not be away from his wife and children any longer, Jorge risked everything to return to the United States and be reunited with his family. In 2013, two days before he was scheduled to leave the country, Jorge received a letter from the Department of Homeland Security letting him know he was granted a one-year stay. For four years, Jorge's life consisted of annual check-ins with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), piles of paperwork to fill out, and a lot of fees to pay; but Christina and the children did not mind this as it meant their dad could stay with them. Unfortunately, their happiness was short-lived. In January 2017, Jorge received another notice stating he only had a six month stay of deportation that was set to expire on June 17, 2018. Today, the family find themselves fighting yet again to stop the deportation of their father.



The last 10 years have been filled with heartache, distrust, and fear for the Zaldivar family. After spending a large portion of their modest income on immigration lawyers and paperwork fees, and even losing their home, Jorge, Christina, and their children have been impacted in many ways other than their family being separated. When they were looking for a new home, Christina recounts how the realtor was concerned seeing the kids search for houses with adequate attics, basements, or any comfortable places their dad would be able to hide from ICE if they ever came looking for him. Their eldest daughter, a 4.0 student, knew she couldn't go to college because the family wasn't able to support her financially and continue to pay for all the immigration related expenses. Now, at ages 23, 19, 14, 10, and 7, the Zaldivar children have spent most of their young lives living in fear of losing their father. Christina has had to serve the roles of both parents: being a full-time worker, a caretaker, and so much more for her family.

Jorge came to this country over 20 years ago looking for his own American dream. He became a husband, a father, a worker, and a community member. Today, he continues to fight, like millions of immigrants around the country, to stay with his family. This report is for them.

Executive Summary

Aggressive detention and deportation enforcement of parents results in severe emotional, physical, and mental strain on family members, in particular on the children in those families. Today's immigration policies are tearing apart families and communities. They deny immigrants human dignity and block them from contributing fully to Colorado's communities and economic progress. There's a maze of regulations and barriers with no roadmap to become a citizen. Nationwide, approximately 16.7 million people are living with at least one undocumented family member. In Colorado, about 276,589 residents live with an undocumented family member including an estimated 130,958 children.¹

Aggressive anti-immigration policies that promote fear and distrust among immigrant communities have serious ramifications that negatively affect child and family health, education outcomes, and economic opportunity, all of which undermines a stable economy and our collective ability to expand widespread prosperity.

One of the many ways that these aspiring Americans contribute to this country is by paying taxes. According to a 2014 analysis, immigrants in Colorado paid \$3.3 billion in state, local and federal taxes, and generated nearly \$10 billion of spending into the state's economy. As well, undocumented immigrants paid nearly \$140 million in state and local taxes.²

As fear about the fate of immigrants and the status of changes to create a common sense immigration process in this country continues to rise, it is important to better understand the short- and long-term impacts that detention and deportation levies on the families that help this country thrive and the costs that are borne by all Coloradans when families are separated.

The purpose of this report is to help inform common sense immigration policies that recognize the hardships and contributions of people living here, keeps families together, and creates a roadmap to citizenship.

This report takes a deeper look into the lives of the children who are left behind when their parent(s) is/are detained and/or deported, and the damaging effects of enforcement on our communities and economy. The data and stories shared in this report are based on surveys from 25 parents who have firsthand experience with deportation. Key findings show that aggressive detention and deportation has a negative impact on children's mental health, educational achievement, and economic stability.



Study Overview

Between March and April 2018, the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (CIRC) and the Colorado Fiscal Institute (CFI) conducted a survey of 25 immigrant families with a total of 67 children to hear directly about how the detention and/or deportation of a parent affected their lives and their children's lives.

Key Findings

Aggressive detention and deportation enforcement of parents and close family members puts children and families at greater risk of:

1. **Mental Health Problems**
2. **Lower Academic Achievement**
3. **Economic Insecurity**

Aggressive detention and deportation affects children's mental health. Parental detention and deportation is traumatic for all family members and communities alike and it takes a toll on the mental health of children. A majority, 80 percent, of the parents surveyed reported that their child or children had experienced anxiety, fear, depression, or separation trauma after the deportation of a parent. They also shared that fear manifested itself in the children's everyday lives. For instance, many parents said their children would get scared when they heard someone knock on the door because they assumed it was local police or ICE coming to take someone from the home.

"Fear of being separated causes major anxiety to the point that everything related even to talking to a lawyer is nerve wracking."

Fear, depression, and anxiety were common themes found throughout parents' responses regarding the change in their children's mental health. This is consistent with a literature review from the Migration Policy Institute, which found that children who are

separated from parents are more likely to report depressive symptoms than children who have not experienced separation.³

Parents felt that the experiences of detention and deportation and its negative impacts have changed the quality of life of their children.

The issue of safety was also tied to a family's quality of life, as 76 percent of parents said their children did not feel safe. The children fear for the safety of the parent who was not deported as well as their own safety. A misunderstanding of immigration law compounded with the fear and distrust of local police causes many children to fear that the other parent may be deported or that they may be deported, even if they are U.S. citizens.

"[Mis hijos] se han vuelto rebeldes, temerosos, incluso sus hábitos de higiene han cambiado. [Mi otro hijo] ha pensado en muerte."

"[My kids] have become rebellious, fearful, even their hygiene habits have changed. [My other son] has thought of death."

Deportation of a parent, or even the threat of deportation, compounds psychological effects of prior separations and causes children to fear that separation can occur again.⁴ When asked if they had sought out or received mental health services, only 15 families answered "yes," including 34 children who received or are receiving services. Of those who answered "yes", many reported receiving support from a mental health clinic or facility. It is equally important to note that various respondents also reported turning to church, God, and their faith as a source of support for their mental health. Previous research suggests that churches play a critical role in providing mental and spiritual support for families, more so than traditional mental health facilities.⁵

Case Study #1

“Que tal si me deportan?” “What if they deport me?”

One mother, Gaby,⁶ shared the traumatic story of having her husband deported after his interaction with local police.

“Ahora ya no confiamos en la policía ni en las autoridades, no queremos tener problemas, que tal si me deportan.”

“Now we no longer trust the police or the authorities, we do not want to have problems, what if they deport me.”

Gaby’s two children are now receiving mental health services as both have experienced emotional stress including problems with sleeping and communicating. The kids no longer want to leave the house as they fear a potential interaction with police, and the younger sibling cries when he sees that mom is not nearby.



“[Mi hijo/a mayor] dejó de hablar por un tiempo. Sus hábitos han cambiado. Vive con miedo. [Mi hijo/a menor] se despierta todas las noches buscando a papá. Llorra, grita, hasta que se queda dormido cansado de llorar.”

“[My older child] stopped talking for a while, his habits have changed, he lives in fear. [My younger child] wakes up every night looking for dad crying, screams until he falls asleep tired of crying.”

Case Study #1

“Que tal si me deportan?”

“What if they deport me?”

Now, as the sole breadwinner Gaby has spent \$20,000 on legal support for her husband and is still \$15,000 in debt. Even with a second job and the support from her church, it is just not enough to care for herself and her two kids. Gaby and her children have experienced firsthand the horrors and suffering of having a husband and father deported, and now all she asks is for our government and elected officials to stop separating families.

“Por favor le pido a los representantes que nos tomen en cuenta y entiendan que, aunque los hijos están sufriendo, el sufrimiento no se puede medir o clasificar. Los niños están siendo terriblemente afectados apóyenlos no separando familias.”

“Please I ask the representatives to take us into account and understand that, although the children are suffering, the suffering cannot be measured or classified. The children are being terribly affected, support them by not separating families.”

The high costs of mental health when families are torn apart. The deportation of a parent has negative effects on children’s mental health and wellbeing which leads to emotional costs that are borne by the children and families but also economic costs that are borne by all Coloradans. Of the total number of kids in the families surveyed, 51 percent of them received or are receiving mental health services after the detention and/or deportation of a parent. Applying this same rate to the total number of children living with an undocumented family member at risk of detention or deportation suggests that about 66,500 Colorado children would have to seek out mental health support if a parent were detained or deported, adding on to the case loads of Colorado mental health professionals.

Although it is difficult to assess the broader mental health costs, Coloradans would take on an estimated additional cost of \$148,000,000 (refer to Table 1) to provide mental health services to children who have had a parent detained and/or deported. The adverse effects of parental deportation on children’s mental health can lead to irregular sleeping habits, increased anger and withdrawal, drops in academic achievement, and long-term behavioral changes according to a 2017 report by the Center on Law and Social Policy (CLASP).⁷ Further, in another study, 75 percent of parents said their children were experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).⁸ Clearly, detention and deportation of parents has detrimental effects on the mental health of children as well as costly consequences when families need mental health services.

It is important to note that both the number of children who would seek services and the broad cost are gross estimates as it is difficult to measure the number of children, from the 130,958, who have a parent who has been detained and/or deported.

Table 1: State Costs of Mental Health Services for Children	
Number of children living with at least 1 undocumented family member	130,958
Portion of children from surveyed families who received/are receiving mental health services	51%
Number of children living with at least 1 undocumented family member who would potentially receive mental health services if a parent was detained and/or deported	66,500
Estimated community-wide cost of mental health per child	\$2,229
Cost to state to provide mental health services to 66,500 children	\$148,000,000

Aggressive detention and deportation affects children's education. Parents reported that they saw a decrease in their child or children's level of achievement in school. In particular, they saw an increase in discipline issues as well as changes in their grades and an overall lack of desire to go to school and continue with daily routines. Seventy-two percent of parents said their children missed at least one day of school, with one parent sharing that one of her children missed a month of school because of the deportation of their father. Sixty-eight percent of parents also saw a decline in their children's grades or achievement level in school.

The detrimental effects and the stress brought on by the deportation of a parent also affects children's behavior. Many parents reported that their children displayed aggressive behavior and 72 percent said their kids experienced discipline problems in school after the detention or deportation.

According to a report by the Center for American Progress, the emotional burden of detention and deportation has long-term consequences on child development that ultimately affect a child's school achievement level and, in the long run,

"The 1st grader is having trouble in school; her grades are dropping, and she is having trouble following directions. The 13-year-old is acting out in school using his phone and not following directions from the teacher. This is very out of character for him, he has always followed directions."

their earnings as adults.⁹ Again, when asked about the changes in children's school achievement level parents consistently used the terms fear, terror, and anxiety in addition to crying and sadness to describe the emotional distress of their kids and how it appeared in their everyday lives and their attitudes and behaviors in school. In a similar survey study regarding the fate of children in the aftermath of deportation by the Urban Institute, parents reported that short-term changes in their children included differences in eating and sleeping patterns, as well as more crying and feeling afraid.¹⁰

Case Study #2

“Papá siempre estaba ayudando con la tarea.”
“Dad was always helping with homework”

Mary, a mom of three, must juggle working overtime with no additional support and no family around. She struggles to pay the bills and help her three children deal with their emotional stress and fear of losing their mom, even though she is a U.S. citizen.

“¡Mi hija de 11 años está bajo del nivel de grado escolar y realmente tiene problemas en la escuela! Papá siempre ayuda con la tarea, es difícil para ella que su papá no esté aquí para ayudarla. Tenemos muchos problemas de comportamiento y emocionales, también ha afectado el éxito escolar.”

“My 11-year-old is below grade level and really struggling at school! Dad was always helping with homework, it’s hard for her that her daddy isn’t here to help. We have lots of behavior and emotional issues, it has also affected school.”

After the deportation of her husband two years ago, Mary felt like she and her children were deported too, since everyone’s lives changed. Her 14-year-old daughter has difficulty expressing how she feels and her 11-year-old is receiving therapy to help cope with her dad being gone.

“¡Es tan inhumano por lo que pasan nuestras familias debido a la deportación! Nuestros niños estadounidenses no se lo merecen, ¡nuestras familias merecen estar juntas! ¡La injusticia debe parar!”

“It’s so inhumane what our families go through due to deportation! Our American children don’t deserve this, our families deserve to be together! The injustice needs to stop!”

The high costs of lowered academic achievement when families are torn apart. The impact of deportation on children’s mental health also impacts children’s academic achievement. Coloradans all shoulder the cost when schools struggle to provide supports, like counselors and social workers, to children who are dealing with the aftermath of detention or deportation of a parent. According to the National Association of School Psychologists, the recommended ratio of school social workers to students is 400:1. If immigration policies continue tearing families apart and parents report a decline in their children’s academic achievement at the same rate as the parents surveyed, Colorado schools would have to hire an additional 150 school social workers, costing an estimated \$7,000,000.

Aggressive detention and deportation affects children and families’ economic stability. Countless studies document the economic hardships families face after the detention and deportation of a parent. In the Urban Institute’s 2007 report, “Paying the Price: The Impact of Immigration Raids on America’s Children,” families who lost breadwinners as a result of immigration raids had to rely on last paychecks, support from extended family, and dwindling savings to get by after being separated from their loved one. Each of the families surveyed also turned to community and religious groups, food banks, and friends and family to help them pay for essential needs like housing and food.¹¹ The Urban Institute’s 2010 report followed families thirteen months after the arrest and/or deportation of a parent to understand the short and long-term effects. Consistent with their 2007 report, families experienced sharp economic declines tied to job and income loss, housing instability, and food hardship. Again, community and faith-based organizations were crucial in helping families pay for essential needs, particularly housing and food.¹²

The findings of CFI’s survey point to similar patterns for families and the economic hardships they faced. Ninety-six percent of the survey respondents said the deported parent was a breadwinner and 60 percent of those families had to rely on outside support for basic needs. Assistance with rent, bills, and food were among the most prevalent necessities that respondents listed. Well over half of those surveyed said churches were the primary source of support, followed by family and community. Only four respondents said they relied on government assistance to help meet their needs.

“Nos ha afectado muchísimo, ahorita en estos momentos estoy a punto de vivir en la calle porque ni siquiera tengo dinero para mi renta.”

“It has affected us a lot, right now I am about to live on the street because I do not even have enough money for my rent.”

Due to the loss of a breadwinner's income and increased pressure to provide for their families, parents said they took on additional jobs, extra hours at work, and had to depend on older children to make ends meet. One mom took on three jobs and had to rely on her eldest son to help pay their rent and utilities, which meant leaving her younger child at the care of his other siblings.



A 2016 study found that the loss of a father's earnings-fathers are most at risk of being the deportees-could decrease a family's household income by 73 percent or a \$24,000 reduction.¹³ The parent who is not deported is then left to deal with their children's mental health and educational setbacks in addition to being the sole provider for their family.

The high costs of economic instability when families are torn apart. When families are torn apart and their lives are disrupted, it causes economic hardship not only for the family but also for all Coloradans. Immigrants play a vital role in Colorado's economy. In 2014, immigrant-led households earned \$14.1 billion dollars and had \$10.8 billion worth of buying power. Immigrants also contributed \$3.3 billion to federal, state, and local taxes with undocumented immigrants alone paying nearly \$140

million to Colorado state and local taxes. Moreover, immigrants contribute to this country's anti-poverty programs. In 2014, immigrants contributed \$378 million to Medicare and \$1.5 billion to Social Security through income taxes.¹⁴ Immigrants are business owners, consumers, and tax payers. However, when detention and deportation separates families, it hinders parents from contributing fully to our communities and our economy and forces them to turn to other means of support to get by.

Case Study #3

“Se preocupan por los gastos de la casa y a veces no quieren salir a jugar.”

“They worry about the expenses of the house and sometimes don’t want to go out and play.”

Sarah’s four children find themselves at a loss after the deportation of their father. Her youngest cries at night for dad and they all fear that police will come at night and take them away. They don’t want to lose their mom and be left alone, but they don’t want to leave to a country they have never known. She notices they lack desire to do anything whether it is school or something as simple as playing outside.

“Ellos no quieren quedarse solos y tampoco quieren salir de su país he notado en ellos tristeza.”

“They do not want to be left alone and they do not want to leave their country I have noticed sadness in them.”

Now, as the single breadwinner, Sarah must work more hours and leave her children to be able to provide for her family. The family must now rely on government benefits to help put food on the table and make ends meet. This has forced her to spend most of her time at work while spending less time with her children, which she feels has affected their quality of life.



Conclusion

Research Findings

To better understand the short and long-term impacts of aggressive detention and deportation on children, this paper analyzed survey responses from 25 families who have first-hand experience with the detention or deportation of a parent.

Key findings from the surveys showed that aggressive detention and deportation enforcement of parents and close family members puts children and families at greater risk of mental and emotional distress, lower academic achievement, and economic instability. Fear, depression, and anxiety emerged as prominent themes throughout respondents' stories, which are consistent with findings from similar studies by the Migration Policy Institute, the Center for Law and Social Policy and the Urban Institute.

In order to move forward and create communities where everyone can thrive, immigration policies must focus on reasonable enforcement that prioritizes family unity over separation. This can be achieved by repealing state and federal anti-immigrant policies that breed fear and distrust. Instead, policy should focus on investing in immigrant children, parents, and individuals who are contributing members of our communities.

Implications and Recommendations

Repeal anti-immigrant policies that create fear and distrust.

This country has prospered throughout history when it has welcomed and invested in immigrant families and communities. A recent public opinion poll found most Coloradans agree with this sentiment. An overwhelming majority of those polled felt undocumented immigrants who live, work, and play by the rules would be able to contribute to their full potential if we invested in fixing our broken immigration system.¹⁵ But, some lawmakers keep expanding harsh anti-immigrant policies that continue to tear children, parents, and families apart. A state-by-state study on the effects of immigration enforcement policies concluded that immigrant households, headed by both undocumented and documented immigrants, saw increases in material hardships when states acquiesced to harsh federal immigration enforcement efforts.¹⁶ Findings from these surveys show that fear has dominated the lives of these children and families and forces them to live in isolation as they fear going to work or doing simple things like going outside to play. The stories of these families are not isolated stories. Across the country children and families are living in fear of being separated by our broken immigration system. To remove the fear barrier, states must move away from anti-immigrant laws that punish immigrants who have lived here for years, or young adults who were brought here at a young age and invest in immigrant families and communities.

One way states can do this is by implementing policies that limit the collaboration between local law enforcement and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). According to a report by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), immigration arrests by ICE increased by 30 percent from fiscal year 2016 to 2017. At the same time, local police officers reported a startling drop in outreach from and cooperation with immigrant communities.¹⁷ Police officers are an integral part of a community. They are supposed to represent safety and justice, but when community members fear local police interaction with ICE, it creates a sense of distrust and hinders immigrants from seeking out police officers when they need them most. This is especially true when considering the setting in which recent arrests have been made. Immigration arrests at courthouses have skyrocketed under the Trump Administration, as reported by the ACLU. Courthouses are seen as locations where people seek justice or remedy for a wrongdoing, not a place where they expect to be apprehended by ICE. As was evident in the survey responses, immigrant parents and children are fearful and distrustful of local police. States should therefore seek to pass policies that restrict local police and ICE interactions, notably in locations that have historically been considered safe such as courthouses, schools, universities and churches.

Invest in Immigrant parents and children to create thriving communities.

When people can't realize their full potential, we make our communities and our state poorer. States should focus on designing policies that create communities where all people feel safe to go about their daily lives so they can continue to be active members of their communities and economies. Findings from a public opinion poll show when it comes to immigration, Coloradans feel our top priorities should be protecting undocumented immigrants, particularly Dreamers, and creating a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who have been here for many years; all policies which help create thriving communities.¹⁸

Colorado immigrants participate widely in the workforce at rates similar to their U.S.-born counterparts. In 2016, 69.3 percent of Coloradans born outside of the U.S. over the age of 16 and 67.8 percent of U.S.-born Coloradans over the age of 16 participated in the labor force. Today, immigrants make up 12 percent of Colorado's labor force.¹⁹

U.S. citizen children of immigrant parents also contribute greatly to Colorado's economy as adults. An extensive study by The National Academies of Sciences Engineering and Medicine found that first generation and later generations of children of immigrant parents contribute to state and the federal economy at much higher rates than their parents because they have more opportunities for higher education and jobs with higher wages.²⁰ This is especially important to consider in the coming years as our economy relies more heavily on children of immigrants to cope with the effects of the aging population.

Overall, the stories and information shared by these families provides critical insight into the debilitating effects aggressive detention and deportation has on children and parents. These include lower grades and achievement level in school, mental health trauma including depression

and anxiety, and economic hardship for all members, especially the remaining parent who must take on all the fiscal responsibility of the family. To move forward we must implement solutions that are based on the principle of family unification and the opportunity to fully integrate into society-for instance through a pathway to citizenship-without fear of being separated from one's family. Communities in Colorado and across the country can only thrive when everybody feels safe and secure and is freely able to participate in their community and the workforce and earn a living, regardless of their status.

Methodology

Qualitative Data

This report investigated the lived experiences of children and families who have experienced the aggressive detention and deportation of a parent or close family member.

To begin the process, The Colorado Fiscal Institute in conjunction with the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition created a survey in English and Spanish that included close-ended and open-ended questions regarding the effects of aggressive detention and deportation on children. A total of 25 surveys were collected. The quantitative responses were translated into English and inputted into an excel spreadsheet. In order to best honor the participants' voices, the researcher used a combination of in-vivo and descriptive coding to analyze the qualitative data. Direct quotes that were salient as well as descriptive words and phrases that directly or indirectly answered the survey questions were coded.

The themes and findings that emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data were compared to other similar studies and reports that looked at the lived experiences of children and families who have been affected by the aggressive detention and deportation of a parent or close family member.

Estimated cost to state of providing mental health services.

To determine the cost to the state of providing mental health services to children who have experienced the detention and/or deportation of a parent, we used the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing's (HCPF) FY 2018-19 Joint Budget Committee Hearing Agenda. First, to determine the cost per child to the state to provide mental health services, we used the most recent capitation amount that Behavioral Health Organizations (BHO) receive to provide mental health services to eligible children. In FY 2016-17, that amount was \$107,000,000. We then found the total number of children receiving services from BHOs, which was 48,000. We estimate that the total cost for mental health services per child is then \$2,229. This is an average amount for the full range of mental health services a child would receive .

According to the University of Southern California's Dornsife Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration, there are approximately 130,958 children in Colorado living with an undocumented family member. CFI assumes this is the total number of children "at risk" of having a parent detained and/or deported. Per our survey, 51 percent of children received mental health services after the detention and/or deportation of a parent. Applying that rate to the total number of children in

Colorado living with an undocumented family member, we estimate that a total of 66,500 children would seek out services if a parent was detained and/or deported.

Finally, taking the total number of children who would receive services and the cost per child to provide services, we estimate a total cost to the state of \$148,000,000 to provide mental health services to 66,500 children.

Estimated cost to state of adding school social workers.

To determine the number of additional school social workers that would be needed to take on caseloads of students who are experiencing a decline in school achievement due to the detention and/or deportation of a parent, we first found the total number of children who would see a decline in educational achievement if a parent was detained and/or deported. To find this number we took the total number of children living with an undocumented family member, 130,958, and per our survey results, applied the rate, 46 percent, of children who saw a decline in their academic achievement after the detention and/or deportation of a parent. We estimate a total of 61,000 children most at risk of experiencing a decrease in their educational achievement if a parent was deported and/or detained.

The National Association of School Psychologists states that the recommended number of students per school social workers is 400:1. Taking this number and the total number of children who would see a decline in their educational achievement, we estimate an additional 150 school social workers would be needed in Colorado schools to support children who have experienced the detention and/or deportation of a parent.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 2017 median wage for a school social worker was \$46,460. Taking the number of additional school social workers needed and the 2017 median wage, we estimate that adding 150 more school social workers would cost approximately \$7,000,000.

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End Notes

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The Colorado Fiscal Institute provides credible, independent and accessible information and analysis of fiscal and economic issues facing Colorado. We work for a Colorado where responsible fiscal and budget policies advance equity and widespread economic prosperity.

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