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COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

September 8, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The Honorable Andrea Chapman
Acting Director and Principal Deputy Director of the Office of Refugee Resettlement
Administration for Children and Families
330 C Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra and Acting Director Chapman,

I am writing to express my concern with the most recent situation at the U.S.-Mexico border highlighted in a September 2, 2022, article published by Reuters entitled, "[EXCLUSIVE Dozens of migrant children reported missing in Houston, raising alarms.](#)"

Harris County, Texas, including Houston, has become the number one county for released unaccompanied minors with more than 6,300 released between October 2021 and June 2022.¹ The record number of migrant children coming to the United States raises significant concerns about the immigration policies championed by the Biden Administration.² Unfortunately, this alarming situation is not an isolated event and represents one of many failures by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in its mishandling of unaccompanied alien children (UACs).

In 2014, a surge of UACs crossed the southern border without documentation and overwhelmed border officials. Following the oversight of this surge by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, of which I am a senior member, conditions and care greatly improved for UACs, until January 2021. Now conditions at the border are worse than ever before. It has never been like this. This fact is confirmed by the recent reports of about a dozen UACs missing in Houston, adding to the approximately 60 UACs reported missing in Houston since late last year.

Today, we are witnessing many of the same abuses that occurred in 2014. These patterns have been brought to light by the Houston police chief after noticing an increase in missing UACs from the homes of their U.S. sponsors. Of even greater concern, dozens of these children have been released to similar addresses. This raises serious questions about the possibility of children being placed in

¹ <https://graphics.reuters.com/USA-IMMIGRATION/CHILDREN-MAP/movanenrbpa/index.html>

² <https://graphics.reuters.com/USA-IMMIGRATION/CHILDREN/zdvxomoegpx/index.html>

an exploitative situation. I am not certain that releasing UACs to non-parent sponsors complies with current law.

ORR has implemented an emergency supervisory review of releases of UACs to non-parent sponsors in the Houston area, as reported in the same Reuters' article. As a senior member of the committee with jurisdiction over your agency, I ask for what you have encountered during this review, even if your results are not complete, and that you provide answers to the following questions:

1. What policies have contributed to this distressing rise in missing unaccompanied alien children and what is being done to correct this situation?
2. Of the about 60 cases in Houston that have been subject to additional review, how many have now been cleared?
 - a. How many children are still missing?
3. What can be done to ensure ORR cross references the addresses where UACs are being sent in the future?
4. Has this emergency review found any evidence of UACs being sex trafficked?
5. What assurances can you give that this same problem is not more widespread?

Due to the seriousness of this situation, I ask for an immediate response.

Sincerely,


Michael C. Burgess M.D.
Member of Congress

CC: Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
Kevin McCarthy, House Minority Leader
Frank Pallone, Chairman, House Energy and Commerce Committee
Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Ranking Member, House Energy and Commerce Committee
James McGovern, Chairman, House Committee on Rules
Tom Cole, Ranking Member, House Committee on Rules

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