

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 19, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

We write to you with extreme concern regarding the increased numbers of unaccompanied children (UC) that have been crossing the border and the care provided to them. It has been widely reported that there is an ongoing crisis at our southern border with a tremendous increase in the number of people crossing the border. In February alone, the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) recorded over 100,000 people attempting to enter the United States, a figure that is nearly three times as large as the numbers this time last year. Raising more concerns, nearly 9,000 UC/single minors crossed the border in February.<sup>1</sup> While this was raised as a concern under the previous Administration, the Biden Administration should be exploring all possible options to address the ongoing crisis. For weeks, the White House has been unwilling to acknowledge the crisis at the border, with White House press secretary Jen Psaki recently placing blame on the Trump Administration.<sup>2</sup> Given the seriousness of this matter, we are requesting a full briefing on the Administration's efforts to address the concerns regarding the surge of UC at the border.

As Congressional Democrats focused on pushing through immigration bills that provided a pathway to citizenship for millions of illegal immigrants, facilities and personnel at the southern border are struggling to manage and house the surge in people entering the United States. These figures include thousands of UC who, after being apprehended by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) immigration officials, are transferred to the care and custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, Southwest Land Border Encounters, available at <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters> (last visited on Mar. 17, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Jon Michael Raasch, *Psaki acknowledges 'big problem' at border, blames Trump administration*, Fox News (Mar. 16, 2021), available at <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/psaki-acknowledges-big-problem-at-border-blames-trump-administration>

*The New York Times* recently reported on the dire state of children in the CBP facilities, noting that they are being forced to sleep on gym mats in overcrowded facilities and go for days without showering.<sup>3</sup> In addition, many children have been in CBP facilities longer than the maximum 72 hours allowed under federal law.<sup>4</sup> To add to those concerns, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has been brought in to help address the ongoing concerns, indicating that this is in fact an emergency.

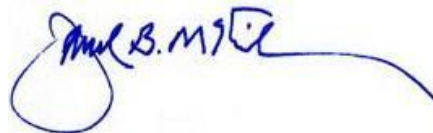
Despite efforts in recent years to increase ORR's permanent bed capacity for UC, as well as efforts to keep influx facilities ready for surges like the one we are currently experiencing, states along the southwestern border, CBP, and ORR have been overwhelmed with the surge in people crossing the border. In addition, there are reports of reduced capacity due to COVID-19 occupancy limits at federal facilities and a lack of preparation in anticipating an increase.<sup>5</sup> We are concerned about the growing number of UC and the current crisis before us. In addition, the border typically sees a surge in migration during the spring months, ahead of the hot summer months, so past migration patterns suggest that the numbers will continue to increase in the coming months. For this reason, we need more information on the efforts of HHS to manage and address its capacity to care for these UC.

Congressional Republicans are focused on addressing this border crisis, but we need to know more about how HHS is managing the current situation. That includes information on the processes being used to transfer UC from CBP facilities to ORR facilities, current and future capacity needs within ORR, and plans to address this surge while prioritizing the safety and well-being of these children. This situation needs to be acknowledged for what it is, a crisis, and we need answers. We welcome a prompt and thorough response to these points and a full Congressional briefing.

Sincerely,



Earl L. "Buddy" Carter  
Member of Congress



David B. McKinley P.E.  
Member of Congress



Michael C. Burgess, M.D.  
Member of Congress



Lance Gooden  
Member of Congress

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<sup>3</sup> Miriam Jordan, Simon Romero, Zolan Kanno-Youngs, *Children Are Sleeping on Mats in Overcrowded Border Facilities*, *The New York Times* (Mar. 15, 2021), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/us/border-migrant-children-texas.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*



Ralph Norman  
Member of Congress



Ashley Hinson  
Member of Congress



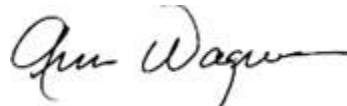
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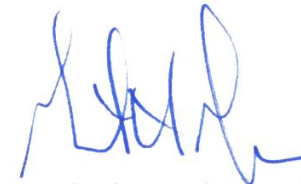
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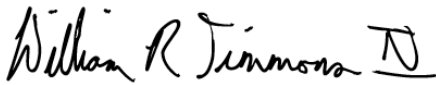
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