

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

June 27, 2018

Secretary Alex M. Azar II  
The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Building  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Director Scott Lloyd  
Office of Refugee Resettlement  
Administration for Children and Families  
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services  
Mary E. Switzer Building  
330 C ST SW  
Washington DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar and Director Lloyd:

We are deeply concerned by recent reports that the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is allegedly mistreating children in custody. We understand that these are allegations, and we want to give you the opportunity to refute and explain what is happening to children in your care. We also are willing to visit shelters, meet with staff and meet children in these facilities.

We understand that more than 10,000 migrant children currently reside in ORR custody. Many of these children are at critical stages in their development and many are under the age of thirteen. Also, a majority of these children enter ORR with a history of stress and trauma. After forced displacement from their home country due to uncontrolled gang and gender violence, travel to the United States with exposures to temperature extremes, injury, sleep deprivation and sometimes violence or kidnapping, these children are vulnerable and fragile.

We are deeply troubled by the Trump Administration's family separation policy. There is absolutely no reason why these children, who have already been traumatized, should be forced to experience the worst trauma possible, the loss of a parent or caregiver. Stress is worsened when children are removed from their families and placed in inappropriate custody arrangements. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, "highly stressful experiences, like family separation, can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress - known as toxic stress - can carry lifelong consequences for children."<sup>i</sup>

There are several documented cases of abuse and mismanagement at ORR shelters. According to an NPR account, a former shelter employee of a Southwest Key shelter in Tucson reported that the shelter lacked trained staff to handle the influx of younger, more traumatized children. The NPR account also described cases at a Texas shelter where children were being denied human contact and comfort even though human contact and emotional support are essential to child development.<sup>ii iii</sup> A Texas Tribune report described immigrant children being forcibly injected with drugs at the Shiloh Treatment Center in Manvel, Texas.<sup>iv</sup> It also found that private companies received more than \$1.5 billion in the past four years to operate immigrant youth

shelters, even though these shelters were accused of serious lapses in care, including neglect and sexual and physical abuse. In nearly all these cases, the Tribune report found that the federal government still continued contracts with the companies after these allegations were raised.

There are also documented cases of abuse and mismanagement at ORR-affiliated facilities. According to the Associated Press, migrant children held at the Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center in Staunton, Virginia are suffering from severe mistreatment and abuse at the hands of guards. These children are reportedly routinely beaten while shackled at the hands and legs, subject to long periods of solitary confinement, and “stripped...of their clothes and strapped...to chairs with bags placed over their heads.”<sup>v</sup> Such allegations of abusive treatment are particularly disturbing since, according to the Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center, many of these children—as young as 14 years of age—suffer from severe mental health issues related to the trauma faced in their home countries.

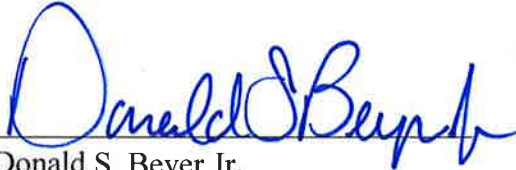
Abuse of children is never acceptable and we are concerned that these immigrant children, with their existing vulnerabilities, are falling prey to neglect and intentional harm. We look forward to hearing the ways in which ORR is responding to these allegations and the steps you are taking to revoke government contracts when appropriate.

We would also like to understand the steps ORR is taking to reunite children with parents who were forcibly separated at the Southern border. We are concerned that ORR is failing to effectively coordinate with DHS to ensure communication and reunification for separated children and their parents.<sup>vi</sup> Many parents do not know where their children are detained, or how they will reconnect and reunite with them.<sup>vii</sup> Advocates and lawyers also report that an April DHS-HHS Memorandum of Agreement<sup>viii</sup> mandating continuous information sharing has both exacerbated family separation and undermined protections for children.

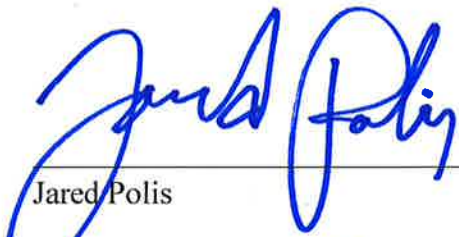
The memorandum has made it difficult for ORR to secure sponsors because it requires potential sponsors’ fingerprints, the fingerprints of all adults living in the potential sponsor’s home, and other data be sent to ICE. ICE has publicly stated its intent to use that information to identify people subject to immigration arrest and deportation.<sup>ix</sup> The collective operation of these policies keeps children apart from parents and family members for weeks, months, or even years longer than they might have otherwise, exacerbating family separation.

We are concerned that ORR, an office within the Department of Health and Human Services, is failing to protect the health of these children and is actively working in ways that harm children. We ask that ORR work with the American Academy of Pediatrics, Save the Children, and UNICEF to ensure that children are treated appropriately. We look forward to reviewing your response to these important concerns in a prompt fashion.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.



Jared Polis




Zoe Lofgren



Ed Perlmutter



Sheila Jackson Lee



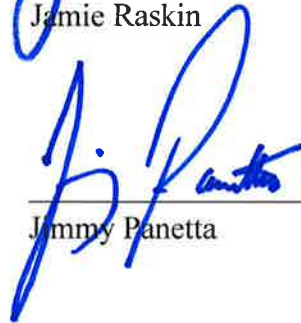
Adriano Espaillat



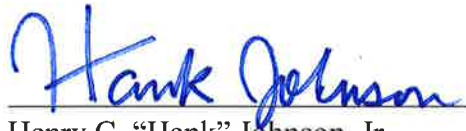
Jamie Raskin



Suzan K. DelBene



Jimmy Panetta



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.



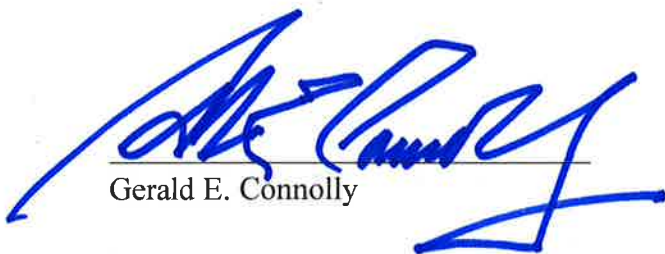
G. K. Butterfield



Darren Soto



Grace Meng



Gerald E. Connolly



Eleanor Holmes Norton



Barbara Lee



Ben Ray Lujan



*Michelle Lujan Grisham*

Michelle Lujan Grisham

*Alan Lowenthal*

Alan Lowenthal

*Bill Foster*

Bill Foster

*Luis V. Gutiérrez*

Luis V. Gutiérrez

*Salud Carbajal*

Salud Carbajal

*Debbie Wasserman Schultz*

Debbie Wasserman Schultz

*Terri Sewell*

Terri A. Sewell

*Ro Khanna*

Ro Khanna

*Michael E. Capuano*

Michael E. Capuano

*Cheri Bustos*

Cheri Bustos

*Gwen Moore*

Gwen Moore

*Pramila Jayapal*

Pramila Jayapal

*Nanette Diaz Barragán*

Nanette Diaz Barragán

*James P. McGovern*

James P. McGovern

*Karen Bass*

Karen Bass

*Albio Sires*

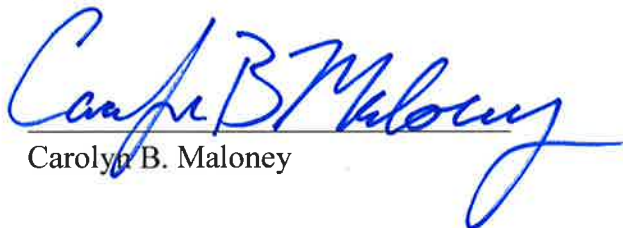
Albio Sires


  
Steve Cohen

  
Dwight Evans

  
Eddie Bernice Johnson


  
Earl Blumenauer

  
Carolyn B. Maloney

  
A. Donald McEachin

  
Joseph P. Kennedy, III

  
Daniel T. Kildee

  
John Lewis

  
Sean Patrick Maloney

  
John Yarmuth

  
Seth Moulton

  
Diana DeGette

  
Judy Chu

  
Pete Aguilar

  
Jim Cooper

J. Luis Correa

J. Luis Correa

Scott H. Peters

Scott H. Peters

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

Dina Titus

Dina Titus

Suzanne Bonamici

Suzanne Bonamici

José E. Serrano

José E. Serrano

Mark Pocan

Mark Pocan

Grace F. Napolitano

Grace F. Napolitano

Sander Levin

Sander Levin

Ruben J. Kihuen

Ruben J. Kihuen

Peter Welch

Peter Welch

Alcee L. Hastings

Alcee L. Hastings

Gregory W. Meeks

Gregory W. Meeks

Donald M. Payne, Jr.

Donald M. Payne, Jr.

Anthony G. Brown

Anthony G. Brown

Eliot L. Engel

Eliot L. Engel

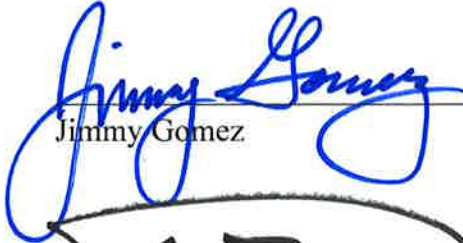




Rick Larsen



Doris Matsui



Jimmy Gomez



Mark Takano




Cedric L. Richmond



Adam Smith



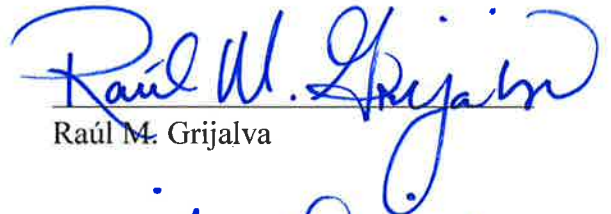
Carol Shea Porter



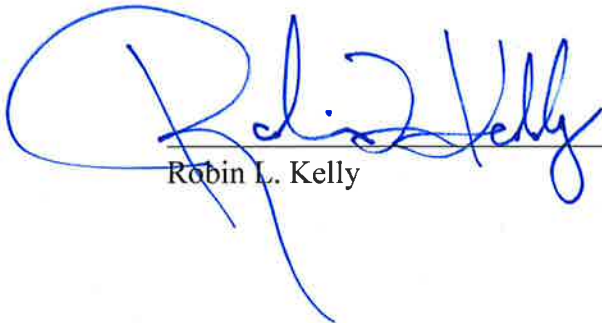
Jared Huffman



Ted W. Lieu



Raúl M. Grijalva



Robin L. Kelly



Mike Quigley

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<sup>ii</sup> “Doctors Concerned About 'Irreparable Harm' To Separated Migrant Children.” NPR, June 15, 2018.

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<sup>iii</sup> Evan L Ardiel, Catharine H Rankin. “The importance of touch in development.” *Paediatr Child Health*. 2010 Mar; 15(3): 153–156. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2865952/>

<sup>iv</sup> Smith, Matt, Aura Bogado. “Immigrant children forcibly injected with drugs at Texas shelter, lawsuit claims.” *The Texas Tribune*, June 20, 2018. <https://www.texastribune.org/2018/06/20/immigrant-children-forcibly-injected-drugs-lawsuit-claims/>

<sup>v</sup> Biesecker, Michael, Pearson, Jake, Garance Burke. “Governor orders probe of abuse claims by immigrant children.” *Associated Press*, June 21, 2018.

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<sup>vi</sup> Nussbaum, Matthew, Johnson, Eliana, Nancy Cook. “Trump's herky-jerky immigration moves sow confusion.” *Politico*, June 21, 2018. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/06/21/trump-administration-family-separations-conflicting-statements-662618>

<sup>vii</sup> Domonoske, Camila, Richard Gonzales. “What We Know: Family Separation And 'Zero Tolerance' At The Border.” NPR, June 19, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/19/621065383/what-we-know-family-separation-and-zero-tolerance-at-the-border>;

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<sup>viii</sup> [https://www.scribd.com/document/380771850/HHS-DHS-MOA-signed-2018-04-13-1?campaign=SkimbitLtd&ad\\_group=66960X1516588X042e8fb5fc666fed94e882d0a950ef95&keyword=660149026&source=hp\\_affiliate&medium=affiliate](https://www.scribd.com/document/380771850/HHS-DHS-MOA-signed-2018-04-13-1?campaign=SkimbitLtd&ad_group=66960X1516588X042e8fb5fc666fed94e882d0a950ef95&keyword=660149026&source=hp_affiliate&medium=affiliate);

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<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=DHS-2018-0013-0001>