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June 29, 2018

Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Inspector General
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Inspector General Levinson:

I am deeply concerned by reports that immigrant children are allegedly being mistreated in federal custody. I am equally concerned that the federal government continues to maintain contracts with the facilities suspected of abuse and that the federal government has denied or limited access both to Members of Congress who have tried to conduct meaningful oversight, and to the press that have attempted to investigate.

Over the past two weeks, numerous reports have detailed misconduct at Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) affiliated facilities. An NPR account 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.^{i ii} The account also describes a former shelter employee of a Southwest Key shelter in Tucson attesting that the shelter lacked trained staff to handle the influx of younger, more traumatized children. In another report, The Texas Tribune described immigrant children being forcibly injected with drugs at the Shiloh Treatment Center in Manvel, Texas.ⁱⁱⁱ Additionally, an Associated Press account of migrant children held at the Shenandoah Valley Juvenile Center in Staunton, Virginia described children 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.”^{iv}

I welcome your office’s investigation into the “conditions at shelters for migrant children.”^v However, the Tribune report found that the federal government maintained contracts with companies operating immigrant youth shelters even *after* allegations of serious lapses in care, including neglect and both sexual and physical abuse, were raised. I ask that you further investigate: (1) how contracts are considered; and (2) how they are evaluated after abuse allegations arise.

Additionally, as Members of Congress have tried to engage in oversight to understand the conditions at shelters for migrant children, reports have shown that they were stonewalled or turned away.^{vi} Similarly, photography and press access has repeatedly been denied and limited.^{vii}

Accordingly, I also ask that you investigate communication and agency guidance regarding Congressional and press access to ORR shelters and affiliated facilities.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.

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- ⁱ “Doctors Concerned About 'Irreparable Harm' To Separated Migrant Children.” NPR, June 15, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/15/620254326/doctors-warn-about-dangers-of-child-separations>; Goudarzi, Sara. “Separating Families May Cause Lifelong Health Damage.” *Scientific American*, June 20, 2018. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/separating-families-may-cause-lifelong-health-damage/>;
- ⁱⁱ 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/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ 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/>
- ^{iv} Biesecker, Michael, Pearson, Jake, Garance Burke. “Governor orders probe of abuse claims by immigrant children.” *Associated Press*, June 21, 2018. <https://apnews.com/afc80e51b562462c89907b49ae624e79>
- ^v “The Latest: HHS inspector general examining migrant shelters.” *Associated Press*, June 27, 2018. https://apnews.com/b530ddddd504d44e3aecd794f6ddf3ed0?utm_medium=AP&utm_campaign=SocialFlow&utm_source=Twitter
- ^{vi} Tillett, Emily. “Senator Jeff Merkley denied entry into one migrant detention facility, claims he saw kids caged in another.” <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/senator-jeff-merkley-barred-brownsville-texas-detention-center-refugee-children-2018-06-04/>; Replogle, Joshua and Ben Fox. “Senator denied entry to see Florida child migrant facility. *Associated Press*, June 29, 2018. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/senator-denied-entry-florida-child-migrant-facility-56018595>
- ^{vii} Waldow, Julia and Emily Kohlman. “This is why there are so few pictures of migrant children.” *CNNMoney*, June 20, 2018. <http://money.cnn.com/2018/06/20/media/media-press-photos-migrant-children/index.html>