

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 21, 2018

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

While we are encouraged the President has signed the Executive Order: *Affording Congress an Opportunity to Address Family Separation* to stop the unnecessary and cruel separation of children from their families, by no means is this crisis over. Given the Finance Committee's jurisdiction over the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the U.S. foster care system, we demand answers on how ACF will ensure the safety, well-being, and reunification of the reportedly more than 2,300 children who have been separated from their families in recent weeks.

Many of the separated children are detained through Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) contracted, non-governmental organizations who operate shelters or foster care programs. While many of these programs are doing all they can to meet the exceptional needs of and provide adequate care and supervision to separated children, these services cannot replace the care and emotional support a parent can provide to his/her child. The unnecessary institutionalization of children poses serious risks to their health and wellbeing, as detailed in a recent investigative report which detailed serious lapses in care in some private facilities, including neglect and sexual and physical abuse.¹

Given conflicting reports and statements from White House and HHS officials, we would like responses to the following:

- How many children are in the custody of the HHS who were separated from their parent(s) at the border and have not yet been reunified with their parents or released to local family members?
- Does HHS have a system to ensure parents or their attorneys can locate their children? Please describe that system.
- Does HHS ensure parents and relatives who are non-English speaking are provided with materials and instructions in their native language or translation services are provided?
- Does HHS have a system to ensure parents in federal custody can speak with their children on a daily basis?
- Does this system extend to parents who have already been deported from the United States?

¹ Bogado, A., Michels, P., Swales, V. & Walters, E. (June 20, 2018). Migrant children sent to shelters with histories of abuse allegations. The Center for Investigative Reporting. Available: <https://www.revealnews.org/article/migrant-children-sent-to-shelters-with-histories-of-abuse-allegations/>

- What is HHS doing to proactively find the parents of detained children and help them make contact with their children?
- Please identify every HHS-contracted care provider where children separated from their parents are presently in custody and the number of separated children in custody at each location.
- Please describe what policies and procedures HHS has put in place to address the unique needs of separated children, as compared to unaccompanied minor children on issues including, but not limited to: communication with parents; access to counsel; and decisions about release.
- Is there any independent monitoring or reporting to ensure that these policies are being followed? If so, who is doing the monitoring/reporting? Please provide the names of the organization involved, contacts at these organizations, and copies of any reports provided to HHS.
- What is the process for reuniting children separated from their parents at the border? Is it different from the process for other unaccompanied children?

Because of the urgent needs of these children and families, we respectfully request answers to these questions by June 27th.

Sincerely,



RON WYDEN
United States Senator



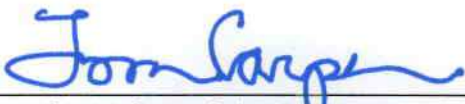
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