

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

April 14, 2021

The Honorable Christi Grimm
Principal Deputy Inspector General
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Deputy Inspector General Grimm:

We write to request that the Office of Inspector General (OIG) open an investigation into the Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) program administered within the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Specifically, we are concerned about ORR's response to the recent surge in migrant children crossing the border and contracting practices that place unaccompanied children into facilities and homes currently being used as foster care placements.

Over 18,800 migrant children crossed the southern border in March of this year, which far exceeds the previous record number of unaccompanied children from May 2019. In February, more than 11,000 children crossed the border. According to the Center for Immigration Studies, Border Patrol apprehensions in March reached a 20-year high and the number of unaccompanied children doubled from February.¹

Recent press reports from Washington State about foster youth being displaced and forced to vacate their residence to provide accommodations for unaccompanied migrant children are very alarming.² With greater than 400,000 children and youth in foster care nationwide, our foster care system already faces tremendous challenges finding safe, loving foster homes for our country's most vulnerable children.

We request that OIG examine the extent to which children in the U.S. foster care system are being impacted by the need for placements for unaccompanied children. Specifically:

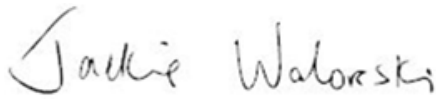
¹ Andrew Arthur, *Border Patrol Apprehensions in March at 20-Year High: Unaccompanied Children Doubled from February, while Families Increased by 174 Percent*, April 8, 2021, Center for Immigration Studies.

² Chris Ingalls, *Foster Family Told to Vacate Renton Home to Make Room for Migrant Children*, March 25, 2021, King5 News.

- How ORR contracting practices with non-profit and other community-based organizations is leading directly or indirectly to displacement of children in foster care; and if displacement is confirmed to be taking place, what alternative options, if any, were considered.
- The extent to which the capacity of state child welfare agencies to place foster children is impacted or burdened due to ORR contracting, across placement settings including foster parents, group homes, residential care facilities, and supervise independent living, specifically in states with placements of large numbers of migrant children; and
- The degree to which state payment practices and foster care maintenance payments, including those authorized by title IV-E of the Social Security Act, are comparable to those rates provided through ORR contracts to reimburse providers for placement of unaccompanied migrant children.

Foster children and youth already face challenges related to a national shortage of foster parents, as well as limited availability of more permanent placements into other appropriate care settings. The surge of unaccompanied children at the border is a humanitarian crisis, and not benign in its impact on the well-being of the vulnerable children that each state in this country works to protect and keep safe every day.

Sincerely,



JACKIE WALORSKI
Ranking Member
Ways & Means Worker and Family Support Subcommittee



MIKE KELLY
Ranking Member
Ways & Means Oversight Subcommittee