

ONE HUNDRED SIXTEENTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
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October 23, 2020

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We write again following another troubling development in the Trump Administration's cruel policy of family separations – news that the parents of 545 children have still not been located.<sup>1</sup> This is shocking and we want to know what actions, if any, the Administration is taking to assist in locating and reuniting these families that have now been separated for more than two years.

As we heard in testimony from child development experts and the independent Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the traumatic psychological effects of separations are expected to be long-lasting for the children and parents who endured even a brief separation.<sup>2</sup> But now, more than two years after the Trump Administration was forced to stop this abhorrent policy, over 500 children still inexcusably remain separated from their parents. In fact, many of the parents were deported back to Central America without their children and have not even been located. This is appalling.

Unlike many of the Trump Administration's scandals, this unfathomable nightmare is still unfolding more than two years later and continuing to afflict undue harm on its victims. As

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *The parents of 545 children separated at the border still haven't been found. The pandemic isn't helping.*, Washington Post (Oct. 21, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Hearing on Examining the Failures of the Trump Administration's Inhumane Family Separation Policy*, 116th Cong. (Feb. 7, 2019); House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, *Hearing on Protecting Unaccompanied Children: The Ongoing Impact of the Trump Administration's Cruel Policies*, 116th Cong. (Sept. 19, 2019).

a result, hundreds of children are still living a nightmare in which they are going to sleep each night without their parent.

Furthermore, when a U.S. District Court ordered that the families be reunited, the Administration refused to take the responsibility for putting these families back together, and instead suggested that immigrant rights groups should do the work. That work continues, with apparently little assistance from the Administration. The difficulties in locating parents of separated children have only been compounded by the Administration's failure to keep adequate records of the children separated under this policy, as revealed in investigations by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and OIG.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, we wrote to you in September, asking whether you attended the May 2018 White House meeting where senior Administration officials reportedly voted on whether to proceed with family separations.<sup>4</sup> If you did not attend that meeting, your answer to us would be simple – but you have not responded.

We reiterate our request about whether you attended the May 2018 White House meeting on family separations, and whether you voted to proceed with this policy. In addition, please provide responses to the following questions by November 6, 2020:

1. What actions, if any, is the Administration taking to assist in locating and reuniting the parents of these 545 children who remain separated more than two years after this cruel policy ended?
2. How many of these 545 children who have not had their parents located were separated during the family separation “pilot program” that was in effect prior to the “Zero Tolerance” policy?
3. According to the *Washington Post*, HHS discharged all 545 children from its care before June 2018, but advocates have been able to contact only 183 of them.<sup>5</sup> Please provide a breakdown of the number of these 545 children for whom HHS has information on their current location, how many of these 545 children for whom HHS does not have information on their current location, and for the latter category, what HHS is doing to

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<sup>3</sup> Government Accountability Office, *Unaccompanied Children: Agency Efforts to Reunify Children Separated from Parents at the Border* (Oct. 2018) (GAO-19-163); Office of Inspector General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Separated Children Placed in Office of Refugee Resettlement Care* (Jan. 2019) (OEI-BL-18-00511).

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr., Chairman, Rep. Anna G. Eshoo, Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Health, and Rep. Diana DeGette, Chair, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, House Committee on Energy and Commerce, to Secretary Alex M. Azar II, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Sept. 17, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> See note 1.

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locate these children.

4. What has been told to these 545 children about the whereabouts of their parents and when they will be reunited?

If you have any questions about this request, please contact Kevin McAloon of the Committee's Majority staff at (202) 225-2927.

Sincerely,



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Chairman



Anna G. Eshoo  
Chairwoman  
Subcommittee on Health



Diana DeGette  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations