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COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
HEALTH — RANKING MEMBER  
ENERGY  
OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

June 11, 2026

The Honorable Brett Guthrie  
Chairman  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Guthrie:

I am writing to request the Committee immediately convene a hearing with Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.; Assistant Secretary for Administration for Children and Families Alex J. Adams; and Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Acting Director Angie Salazar to examine the operation of ORR's Unaccompanied Children Program under the Trump administration since taking office in January 2025.

Over the past 17 months, ORR has taken a host of actions that undermine the safety and well-being of the very unaccompanied children the agency is statutorily required to provide care and services for. As the former House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Chair in the 116th and 117th Congresses, Democrats wrote oversight letters, held hearings, and completed an investigation in the first Trump term when unaccompanied children apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border were separated from their families as part of the administration's controversial "zero tolerance" immigration policy. In my current role as the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Health, I am concerned these actions are part of a coordinated strategy initiated in that first Trump administration that continues today to roll back protections for this vulnerable population and even unravel the Unaccompanied Children Program altogether.

Congress carefully crafted ORR's statutory mandate to meet unaccompanied children's particular vulnerabilities. On a bipartisan basis under the Homeland Security Act of 2002, Congress vested ORR with responsibility for the care and placement of unaccompanied children in recognition that appropriate standards must be instituted to protect the rights and needs of vulnerable children in government custody.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, the Act placed this agency within HHS, which is under my Subcommittee's jurisdiction. In doing so, it separated ORR's child welfare functions from the immigration law enforcement duties assigned to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components, reflecting congressional intent that ORR prioritizes the safety and well-being of these children, guided by their best interests and informed by child welfare expertise—

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<sup>1</sup> P.L. 107-296.

not by deportation quotas. Congress has entrusted the agency with ensuring these children are housed safely, receive essential legal, social, medical, and mental health services, are protected from abuse and exploitation, and are placed with vetted, safe sponsors in a timely manner.

Under the Trump administration, ORR has all but abandoned this statutory mandate and rendered itself increasingly indistinguishable from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Instead of upholding the safety of unaccompanied children in its custody, ORR worked in tandem with ICE to attempt unlawful summary removals of Guatemalan unaccompanied children to the same dangers they had fled. A whistleblower report revealed ORR itself had flagged at least 30 of these children presented trafficking, abuse, or other protection concerns.<sup>2</sup> Rather than timely placing children in its custody with parents and other vetted, safe sponsors, ORR has broadly obstructed safe sponsor placements, detaining children for average periods exceeding 200 days at grave expense to children's mental health and due process.<sup>3</sup> Far from ensuring provision of essential legal services to unaccompanied children, ORR terminated funding for legal representation of over 26,000 unaccompanied children across the country and is now violating multiple laws by refusing to pay legal services providers for services already rendered.

When an agency under this Committee's jurisdiction subverts its own statutory mandate, the Committee has a duty to conduct oversight. Yet no government officials have come before the Committee this Congress to account for ORR's actions.

Such a hearing would provide Members with an opportunity to examine, among other things:

1. ORR's management of the Unaccompanied Children Program since January 2025;
2. Changes to sponsor-vetting, reunification, and child-release procedures;
3. Information-sharing practices between ORR, DHS, and other federal agencies;
4. Average lengths of stay for children in ORR custody and factors contributing to prolonged detention;
5. Access to legal services, medical care, mental health services, educational programming, and language services for children in and/or released from ORR care;
6. Allegations, investigations, and reporting of abuse, neglect, self-harm, or other child welfare concerns within ORR-funded facilities;
7. ORR's closure of licensed shelters and other care programs and any relocation of unaccompanied children to less-regulated facilities;
8. Staffing levels, leadership changes, and workforce capacity within ORR; and

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA). (2025, September 2025). Padilla, Durbin Call for Oversight Hearings After Whistleblower Report Alleges Trump Admin Lied About Safety of Unaccompanied Guatemalan Children to Deport Them [Press Release]. <https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-durbin-call-for-oversight-hearings-after-whistleblower-report-alleges-trump-admin-lied-about-safety-of-unaccompanied-guatemalan-children-to-deport-them/>.

<sup>3</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Data," <https://acf.gov/orr/about/ucs/facts-and-data>.

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9. Compliance with the Homeland Security Act, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, the Flores Settlement Agreement, and other applicable legal requirements.

The Committee has a longstanding bipartisan responsibility to oversee federal programs serving vulnerable children. Unaccompanied children in federal custody are among the most vulnerable populations under the direct care of the federal government. Congress has an obligation to ensure ORR is operating transparently, fulfilling its legal responsibilities, and prioritizing the health, safety, and welfare of every child entrusted to its care.

I respectfully request the Subcommittee hold this hearing before the August District Work Period scheduled to begin on July 24.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diana DeGette".

Diana DeGette  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Health  
Committee on Energy and Commerce

cc: The Honorable Morgan Griffith, Chairman, Subcommittee on Health