



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3605

April 8, 2021

The Honorable Kamala Harris
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Vice President Harris:

I write today out of continued concern for the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crisis at our southern border. The policies and inactions of this administration have greatly exacerbated a crisis that is quickly overwhelming state and local resources, and placing American and migrant lives endanger, particularly those of unaccompanied minors. As the recently appointed lead for the administration response to this crisis, it is imperative that you have a full breadth of understanding of the challenges we currently face.

The recent numbers of unaccompanied children illegally crossing into the United States has been nothing short of startling. In late March, the administration reported that over 18,000 unaccompanied children were currently in US custody. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) estimates indicate up to an additional 22,000 children may attempt to cross our border illegally in the month of April and increasing to a staggering 25,000 in May. For comparison, the previous highwater marks for these months were 8,880 and 11,475, respectively. The surge in these numbers has outpaced CBP and partnering agencies' capacity and capability to provide proper care for these children.

The majority of these unaccompanied minors are being housed in facilities, like the one in Midland, Texas, hastily established by the Health Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS ORR), with little to no coordination or communication with state and local officials. This lack of transparency and coordination has seemingly manifested severe safety concerns within the facilities that place these children in jeopardy. These concerns of an unsafe environment have been repeatedly expressed to the HHS ORR by state, local, and federal partners with no answers. In the past 24 hours, there have been multiple reports of allegations of abuse, sexual assault, insufficient staffing and reporting protocols, and numerous COVID infections at facilities in Texas, including the Midland location. These reports have prompted an

investigation by Governor Greg Abbott. Additionally, our office has reported these allegations to the HHS Inspector General (IG).

While there are grave safety and security issues for these children presented by smugglers and human traffickers during their journey to our border, it unfortunately appears those concerns are not quelled once they reach US custody. It is hard to feel these unsafe environments could be avoided with a modicum of transparency and an effort to communicate with state and local officials. With estimates that HHS will need an additional 34,000 beds to accommodate nearly 54,000 children in their custody by September, this problem is not going away anytime soon. It is crucial we get this fixed now.

As a father of three young girls, it is heartbreaking to hear the stories of these children and I sincerely wish you well in this endeavor to leading the administration's efforts to address these mounting problems. I call on you to immediately come to our district to see the plight of these minors firsthand. The administration's refusal to come and visit these areas or respond to our concerns is only making matters worse and endangering more lives. Make no mistake, this is a crisis that must be dealt with immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "August Pfluger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

August Pfluger
Member of Congress