

May 20, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
300 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Secretary Becerra and Secretary Mayorkas:

We write to seek information on the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) management of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) in federal custody and the facilities used to house them. We are particularly concerned about recent reports regarding the use of Chattanooga, Tennessee, as a central location for resettling UACs in the United States.

There are media reports that, within the last week, at least four planes carrying UACs landed at Wilson Air Center in Chattanooga, Tennessee, before swiftly boarding the children onto buses and transporting them to multiple cities across the southeastern United States for apparent resettlement, with zero transparency regarding what was happening. For months, reports have detailed how thousands of children are being housed in neglectful conditions at mass shelters operated by HHS under a veil of secrecy. We are deeply troubled by the lack of transparency and accountability regarding the conditions that HHS is subjecting these children to.

Several governors, including Governor Bill Lee of Tennessee, have written to President Biden expressing alarm over how the federal government has circumvented state authorities by placing UACs in their states' facilities with little transparency, consent, or coordination.

These reports raise many questions that need to be answered, but the basic question that must be answered is whether the federal government is using Tennessee as a central location for resettling UACs in the United States. The citizens of Tennessee are entitled to more information. After all, their schools, hospitals, and law enforcement agencies will bear the burden of this reported resettlement, which is the product of an ongoing border crisis that is making every town a border town.

In 2014, Congress became aware of a similar matter regarding a facility operated by HHS that housed over a thousand children. Attempts at oversight of how HHS was managing care for children were limited by undue visiting restrictions and heightened secrecy. Sadly, it appears this pattern is repeating itself.

In light of these recent reports and HHS's past secrecy, we ask that you schedule a briefing with us to discuss the Department's management of UACs, including any operations in Chattanooga and Tennessee at large.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



Bill Hagerty
United States Senator



Chuck Fleischmann
United States Representative