

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0305

October 24, 2022

January Contreras
Assistant Secretary, Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Assistant Secretary Contreras:

On February 24, 2022, your predecessor admitted to me that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) was unable to contact 19,726 sponsors of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) since January 2021. In other words, the Department lost nearly 20,000 UAC in a 13-month period. This is shocking. The nonchalant attitude displayed in the response highlights the total lack of accountability throughout the Department for the welfare of UAC and is offensive.

The response did not provide information about any steps that are being taken to ensure the safety and well-being of the UAC when the care provider is unable to contact a sponsor. It indicated that a Notification of Concern could be issued, but it did not mention that any such notifications had been issued. This leads me to believe that HHS is not issuing Notifications of Concern to ensure that follow up actions are taken. This is unacceptable.

Additionally, the response indicated "ORR does not verify a potential sponsor's immigration status." In nearly every case, illegal aliens are not authorized to work in the United States. This means that they would be unable to legally work to earn money to support and provide for UAC placed in their care. HHS's refusal to verify the immigration status of potential sponsors means that it may be placing UAC in the care of illegal aliens unable to work and provide for the UAC's needs. This fact, coupled with your inability to contact sponsors following the placement of UAC in their care raises serious concerns about the safety and well-being of children that your Department appears to be ignoring.

It took five months to receive the response to my previous letter. That is an unacceptable length of time. Please provide updated data and answers to the following additional questions by November 4, 2022.

1. Please provide an update on the number of UAC that HHS has placed with sponsors since January 20, 2021.
2. Please provide an update on the number of UAC that HHS has placed with sponsors since January 20, 2021, who are not the child's parent or legal guardian.

3. Please provide an update on the number of UAC that HHS has placed with sponsors since January 20, 2021, who are not related to the child.
4. Please provide an update on the number of Safety and Well Being Follow Up Calls has HHS conducted since January 20, 2021.
5. Please provide an update on the number of sponsors has HHS been unable to contact since January 20, 2021.
6. Has any other Department released UAC to sponsors? If so, which Department and how many UAC has it released.
7. Has HHS taken custody of any illegal aliens that are not UAC? If so, how many and what did HHS do with those aliens.
8. What steps does HHS take to ensure that a potential sponsor is authorized to work in the United States and able to financially provide for the UAC?
9. Since January 20, 2021, how many UAC has HHS placed with sponsors not authorized to work in the United States?
10. After learning that your Department lost nearly 20,000 UAC, what steps have been taken to ensure that sponsors respond to Safety and Well Being Follow Up Calls?
11. Since January 20, 2021, has HHS implemented any additional contact requirements, in addition to the initial Safety and Well Being Follow Up Call, to ensure that the UAC it has placed with sponsors are safe?
12. What steps has HHS taken to contact the 19,726 sponsors identified in your previous response?
13. Since January 20, 2021, has HHS terminated the Sponsor Care Agreement with any sponsors for failure to comply with the agreement?
14. Since January 20, 2021, has HHS conducted any home visits to confirm that UAC placed with sponsors by HHS are actually being properly cared for by the sponsor?
15. How many Notifications of Concern has HHS issued since January 20, 2021?

We look forward to receiving a timely response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Biggs".

Andy Biggs
Member of Congress