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CITY OF LONG BEACH

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RE: Testimony prepared for the House Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations hearing entitled "Unaccompanied Children at the Border: Stakeholder Perspectives on the Way Forward"

Good afternoon Chairwoman Barragan, Ranking Member Higgins, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee.

I am Mayor Robert Garcia of the City of Long Beach, California. And I am here today to address the Subcommittee about our City supporting what really is a humanitarian mission—helping to establish a federal migrant children emergency shelter at the Long Beach Convention Center.

Long Beach is home to approximately half a million people of all backgrounds. Located in Southern Los Angeles County, our city has a rich history of welcoming immigrants and refugees from around the world. In particular, refugees from Cambodia that fled persecution are an important part of our community.

My personal history is also one of an immigrant. I came to this country from Peru when I was 5 years old. I came under different circumstances than the children we are hosting, but still poor and without many services. I became an American citizen when I was 21 years old, and it was the proudest day of my life. I come to this Subcommittee hearing today with the lived experience of an immigrant seeking a better life and the American dream.

The Long Beach Convention Center is currently set up to host a total of 1,000 migrant children at any given time, ranging from ages 0 to 17. This partnership with HHS was approved unanimously by the Long Beach City Council because our city believes it was the right and compassionate thing to do. The City's role in this humanitarian effort is to provide the facility and to connect HHS with local service providers, while HHS operates the site. The mission of the facility is quick family reunification, using the space temporarily through August 2, 2021.

Every child that comes to the Long Beach facility is provided with the best of care. It's very important to me that these children are welcomed and cared for in every way—much like those who showed my family and me kindness when we came to the United States.

They are provided with three meals a day and snacks prepared by our convention center catering staff. Multiple classrooms are set up, and every child is provided with hours of class time a day, with teachers from Long Beach and the surrounding area.

The Long Beach facility also offers outdoor space and activities for children to enjoy. In addition, there are indoor recreational activities, including books, video and board games, and movies.

Important services are being provided by HHS and partner agencies to every child—most importantly, medical service. In partnership with UCLA medical center, the Long Beach site has a full-size clinic where diagnostic and immediate care is provided. The utmost care is being taken to look after each child’s medical needs to ensure their safety and the safety of those around them. This is in addition to other services, including social workers, mental health care, legal representation and resources to manage their needs.

We have paired the federal government in Long Beach with local organizations and providers to help in this endeavor. This is a whole of Long Beach approach to make this shelter a success.

These children have come directly from the border. Most arrive alone without parents or family. Bringing them to shelters like ours is a more humane approach to caring for children than keeping them at the border. HHS is focused on quick family reunification. Temporary sites like the Long Beach Convention Center are necessitated by this humanitarian crisis, but we must ensure that these sites do not replace lasting immigration reforms.

It breaks my heart that we have an immigration system today that is broken. It’s been decades since we’ve had any kind of immigration reform. Strong immigration reform, investment in our neighbors, humanitarian missions, and diplomacy are needed to address the current migration of children and others.

Central to any immigration reform effort needs to be a clear and fair pathway to citizenship for those who are undocumented in our country.

DREAMERS and those who have served in the military should go to the front of the line. And a strong guest worker program must be developed with input and support from neighboring countries. We must also provide additional aid and support to Mexico and Central American countries. These reforms are not only necessary but would be transformational for our economy, national security, and millions of families.

We must also expand resources for asylum-seekers, so that unaccompanied children arriving at the border have access to counsel, interpretation, and other critical services. We must ensure children are not held at border facilities, which are no place for children. And we must work with HHS and local partners to identify sponsors and resources for these children as fast as possible.

Our top priority should be to address the underlying reasons why these temporary facilities are needed in the first place. With additional resources and immigration reform efforts, we can prevent the need for emergency intake sites.

Thank you for welcoming me today to address this Subcommittee. I look forward to your questions.