

**Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers
House Energy and Commerce Committee
Oversight & Investigations Hearing
“Insights from the HHS Inspector General on Oversight of
Unaccompanied Minors, Grant Management, and CMS”
July 25, 2023**

INTRO

Secretary Becerra, I remain deeply troubled for how you are leading the Department of Health and Human Services.

You have broken the American people’s trust on nearly every front.

BORDER

I’ll begin today with your complete failure to assure the safety and well-being of unaccompanied children crossing the border.

Under President Biden, we’ve faced the worst border crisis in our history.

ORR received referrals for more than 350,000 unaccompanied children over the course of the first three years of his presidency.

That is more than 120,000 unaccompanied minors passing through ORR’s custody annually.

This is unprecedented. Prior to President Biden, the largest single year of total referrals was about 69,000.

As the New York Times has uncovered, this border crisis has left children alone and exploited. These are just a few of the gut-wrenching examples:

- 13 and 14-year-olds are working 12-hour shifts on farms and factories.
- Children dropping out of school or never signing up because they owe a debt to the smuggler that trafficked them.

Children running away from sponsors ORR placed them with because they were being sold for sex.

OVERSIGHT

We are going to talk a lot about the 85,000 children that ORR could not contact after placement. ORR claims that its 81 percent successful post-release contact rate is a significant accomplishment.

It is not a success when the agency lost immediate contact with a third of migrant children during the first two years of the Biden administration.

And post-release follow-up is already a low bar, ORR considers it a success if they merely speak with a child or a sponsor over the phone.

Secretary Becerra, I am especially concerned about specific policies and practices you've put into place that prevent ORR from vetting sponsors.

- You allowed ORR to waive criminal background checks, including checks of the sex offender and child abuse registries, for sponsors and other adults living in households where children are placed.
- Under your watch, digital fingerprinting to confirm the identity of sponsors dropped by 55 percent.¹
- Since the start of President Biden's term and when you became Secretary, at least 30,000 minors have been handed over to someone ORR knows they are **not** related to.
- As an internal memo revealed, the department you oversee became quote "one that rewards individuals for making quick releases, and not one that rewards individuals for preventing unsafe releases."

The consequences of these decisions were entirely foreseeable...

¹ Sen. Portman Report 2022

.... and again—thanks to the New York Times—we know that reports reached your desk that children were at risk.

The American people deserve to know how you could have possibly ignored the warning signs...

... and continued to put more children in danger of exploitation.

RULE OF LAW

As I mentioned, this isn't the only example of mismanagement and abuses of power at HHS.

You failed to follow the law and the Constitution to reappoint 14 NIH officials, including Dr. Fauci.

As a result, they exercised power and authority they didn't legally have in approving billions of dollars in taxpayer funded grants.

There is a crisis of confidence at your public health agencies, including the CDC, FDA and NIH.

CMS is denying seniors approved Alzheimer's medications...

... and dragging its feet on meaningful price transparency rules to lower drug costs.

The FDA's baby formula shortage caused panic and harm to mothers, fathers, and children across the nation.

You have failed to provide transparency for President Biden's radical spending agenda that fueled record-breaking inflation.

For the sake of time, I won't go on but I will close by saying this...

HHS has lost sight of its core mission.

As Chair Griffith said, there seems to be more concern with politics and power, than people's safety and well-being.

There is a culture of arrogance and lawlessness that needs to change.

May the change start **today** with you... the very top of the department's leadership... taking full responsibility for your actions.

You are testifying before this committee under oath.

We expect and need honest and complete answers for what has happened under your watch.

Thank you and I yield back.