

**“The Trump Administration’s Child Separation Policy: Substantiated Allegations of  
Mistreatment”**

**House Committee on Oversight and Reform**

**10:00 AM, Friday, July 12, 2019**

**2154 Rayburn House Office Building**

**Rep. Gerald E. Connolly (D-VA)**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today’s hearing to examine the Trump Administration’s child separation policy and the deplorable conditions at the southern border. Both the Administration’s zero-tolerance policy and its policy to refer all parents who make unauthorized border crossings for prosecution have resulted in thousands of children being separated from their parents at the southern border. These children are forced to live in overcrowded, unhealthy, and unsafe conditions. This Administration’s immigration policy has generated a humanitarian crisis that is putting the welfare of children at risk. We must end these deplorable and inhumane practices. Period.

Documents obtained via Committee subpoenas from DHS, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services reveal that this crisis is worse than the Trump Administration has let on. The Administration claimed that the zero-tolerance policy, which separated children from their parents, was necessary to allow the government to criminally prosecute some parents charged with criminal offenses. But this was untrue. Records show that some of these parents were never sent to federal criminal custody. In other cases, prosecutors declined to bring charges against these parents. Clearly, there was no prosecutorial purpose in separating these families. The only purpose was to be cruel and inflict harm. Because of these lies and the Administration’s cruelty, hundreds of children were ripped from their families. Some of these children’s parents were deported while their children remained in substandard Border Patrol facilities. And despite a court order in June 2018 to reunite these children with their families, we discovered that the Administration continued to separate children from their parents. More than 700 additional children have been separated from their families since that court order.

This humanitarian crisis at the southern border was illustrated vividly—and disturbingly—in reporting by the Associated Press and the New Yorker that detailed the squalid living conditions in migrant detention centers. In one such center in Clint, Texas, a facility holding approximately 350 children although it was intended to hold 104 people, several children had neither bathed nor changed clothing in weeks, young children were caring for unrelated infants and toddlers, and flu and lice outbreaks have necessitated quarantines.

These inhumane conditions are in direct contradiction with the Flores settlement, a legal agreement stipulating that children be held in safe and sanitary conditions, as well as the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, which requires that children be removed from the custody of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) within 72 hours. Children at the Clint, Texas facility have been under CBP custody for more than three weeks, where conditions, as described above, are clearly unsafe and unsanitary.

This humanitarian crisis is the latest demonstration of an immoral and indifferent Trump immigration policy that traumatically tears apart families, neglects the physical, psychological, emotional, and social well-being of young children, and locks up asylum seekers fleeing violence and seeking refuge in the hope and opportunities of America. The congressional delegation that recently visited border facilities witnessed firsthand the harsh conditions in which these children are living. I am grateful to my fellow Committee Members for exposing this dire situation and for their willingness to testify before us today.

After supporting the House humanitarian assistance funding bill, I voted against the Senate border appropriations bill. In the House, we developed a strong bill that included key protections for children at the border. That bill prohibited the Trump Administration from covering up child fatalities, provided for uninhibited and direct Congressional oversight of detention facilities, prohibited the Administration from allowing children to languish in unlicensed short-term shelters, and ensured children would have their medical, hygiene, and nutrition needs met. In contrast, the Senate bill seeks to provide more funding to ICE and CPB. Funding without these important conditions simply gives us more of the same.

We can and should do more to protect and help children and families detained at the border. We can and should do more to ensure that this Administration cannot hold children in cages. I called on Congress to cancel recess if we could not pass a bill that alleviates the humanitarian crisis at the border. It is my sincere hope that the enacted funding bill does bring relief, but we should be under no illusion that the Senate bill is the best we could do on behalf of those children suffering and dying on our southern border.

I thank the Chairman for holding today's hearing and ensuring the Committee hears directly from the inspectors general of the agencies responsible for the harsh conditions at border detention centers. The Trump Administration is woefully incapable of managing the growing humanitarian crisis at the southern border. Children are suffering in squalid conditions as a direct result of Trump Administration policies. The Administration must stop separating children from their families and stop the unnecessary detention of children, families, and other refugees and asylum-seekers. Protecting children is our ultimate goal.