



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Opening Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Authorizing Issuance of Subpoena Markup

November 20, 2019

Nearly eleven months ago, this Committee requested documents from the Department of Homeland Security related to its policies and activities at the southwest border. Without objection, I am inserting in the record letters seeking border related documents to the Department dated -- January 4, 2019; July 3, 2019; and October 18, 2019. The letters only tell part of the story of our extensive efforts to secure this information.

For almost a year, staff has also been engaged in ongoing discussions with representatives from both DHS' Legislative Affairs and General Counsel's Office. To date, these efforts have yielded information that is largely unresponsive to our requests regarding programs that impact children and families. We are here today because the Department has failed -- repeatedly -- to provide substantive information and is obstructing this Committee's oversight efforts. The documents sought under this resolution relate to families and children who have been directly affected by the Trump Administration's border security policies.

The Committee has requested any decision memorandum, policy, or guidance document to explain the "zero tolerance" policy that, starting in the summer of 2018, led to thousands of children being separated from their families. As of today, the Committee does not know how many children were separated from their parents, and what we do know about separated children came from news articles, not from DHS. Further, DHS has provided little or no information on how it decided to implement the legally questionable process for metering asylum seekers at land ports of entry.

Together, the "zero tolerance" and metering policies are responsible for inflicting great harm to children and other vulnerable people at our border. Then, there is the matter of the deaths of children in DHS custody. When it comes to these deaths, DHS has provided none of the documentation sought since January 2019. The Committee's oversight activities with respect to the Department's treatment of children and families at the southwest border is critical. This Committee has an obligation to carry out oversight of the Department of Homeland Security and its policies. To do so in a thoughtful and meaningful way, we must have the information we need. As such, I urge all Members of this Committee to join me in voting in favor of today's resolution.

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