



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) *Unaccompanied Children at the Border: Stakeholder Perspectives on the Way Forward*

April 27, 2021

I thank Chairwoman Barragán for holding today's hearing on unaccompanied children at the southern border and for her leadership on this important issue.

Despite some of the rhetoric about the situation at the southern border, this challenge is not new. We have seen increased arrivals of unaccompanied children and others at the U.S.-Mexico border in 2014, 2018, 2019, and more in previous decades. When there was a surge of families and children at the border in 2018, President Trump tore children from their parents. In 2019, President Trump instituted a series of anti-immigrant policies that failed to address the root cause of increased migration, caused thousands of children to languish in government custody, and squandered millions on projects that failed to secure the border.

In 2020, when arrivals started trending upward, rather than preparing to address the situation, the Trump Administration continued dismantling our immigration infrastructure and began expelling unaccompanied children into Mexico alone instead of allowing them to seek protection provided for under the law. Instead, the Biden Administration is responding to the challenge by treating children humanely and working to fix the underlying causes of this situation.

Federal agencies are working closely with local communities to provide temporary shelter and COVID 19 testing for the vulnerable children. The Biden Administration is also working with non-governmental organizations like Kids in Need of Defense to provide and connect unaccompanied children with legal services, essential medical care, and educational opportunities. All of these efforts are designed to get kids out of CBP facilities and quickly reunite them with their families.

The Administration is also restarting the Central American Minors Program to allow unaccompanied children apply for protection in their home country and make a safe, orderly journey to the U.S. if they qualify. These are real actions taken to hopefully address one of the many factors pushing children to make the dangerous journey to our border.

Last week, former Trump advisor Stephen Miller's organization filed its first lawsuit to force the Biden Administration to begin expelling vulnerable unaccompanied children to Mexico again. It is simply unconscionable that some would try to bring back the Trump Administrations inhumane policy of returning vulnerable children back to the dangerous conditions they fled. Returning to inhumane policies toward children should be a non-starter.

Border security is a priority for this Committee and the Biden Administration, but we also must not lose focus on other issues like domestic terrorism and critical infrastructure protection. We also do not have

to sacrifice border security to treat vulnerable unaccompanied children with basic decency. We can have both.

Secretary Mayorkas and the men and women of DHS have made good progress in addressing the situation at the border, but we still have a long road to fully repair the system. I am eager to hear from our witnesses today on possible ways Congress and the Administration can help address this ongoing challenge in the short- and long-term while continuing to uphold our values.

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