



One Hundred Thirteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I am writing in response to the July 18, 2014 letter submitted to you by Governor Phil Bryant that expressed his views on the influx of unaccompanied children at the southwest border and the prospect that some of the children may be housed at facilities in Mississippi. At the outset, Mr. President, let me say that on this matter, Governor Bryant does not speak for all Mississippians. I have spoken at great length with a diverse array of citizens from across the Hospitality State and the message to me, as I go about my work as a Member of Congress and as Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security, is that this is a humanitarian crisis involving children and we must do all we can to give assistance.

I have been to both Honduras and El Salvador, two of the countries from where these children have fled. I have seen firsthand the horror that drug cartels and criminal gangs inflict on people of all ages, especially children. Additionally, I have been to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the epicenter of this crisis along our border. I have had Border Patrol agents share their firsthand accounts of children who, after surviving the lengthy, perilous journey through Central America and Mexico, did not attempt to evade the agents, but rather came running into their arms. To further underscore my point about this being a humanitarian crisis, I would note that a large percentage of these children, some of whom have been exploited by human smugglers and criminal gangs, likely have actionable asylum claims.¹

¹ Letter from Jonathan Ryan, Executive Director of Refugee and Immigration Center for Education and Legal Services to Speaker Boehner and Leader Pelosi, July 18, 2014.

Over the years, I have heard Governor Bryant espouse how his Christian beliefs inform the positions he takes as a public figure. As a Christian who is the product of a similar religious tradition to Governor Bryant, I have great difficulty in understanding the position he is taking with respect to treatment of these children in this humanitarian crisis. After all, Jesus was a child migrant who fled to Egypt to avoid violence and persecution, and spent his life assisting newcomers, the less fortunate, and others marginalized by society.

We have a moral obligation to treat children fleeing from unspeakable violence and danger with care and respect to ensure they are in a safe environment while in this country. As a Member of Congress, I view it as my obligation to help facilitate partnerships between the Federal government and appropriate local facilities to help ensure that such care is provided. The directors at a number of facilities throughout Mississippi have contacted my office for more information on how they could make space available for these children. They are ready, willing, and able to care for these children until they are reunited with families or have their day, hopefully with the assistance of counsel, before an immigration judge. I am not quite sure why Governor Bryant would want to stand in the way of that result. After all, it is the Federal government, not the states, that provides the funding necessary to care for these children.

Time will tell how long this crisis persists, but we have a moral obligation as Americans and as decent human beings to do right by the kids that have, against the odds, reached our border. Many Mississippians agree on this – you can count me among them.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Ranking Member