

For Immediate Release
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FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Unaccompanied Alien Children sheltered at Homestead Job Corps Site, Homestead, Florida

The Homestead Job Corps facility was activated to provide temporary shelter beds for unaccompanied alien children (UAC) cared for by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in February 2018. It was previously vacant and had not been in operation as a Jobs Corps center since August 2015. This was a prudent step to ensure that HHS is able to meet its responsibility, by law, to provide shelter for UAC referred to its care by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

HHS sheltered over 8,500 UAC at Homestead from June 2016 to April 2017, at which time influx operations ended at the facility. In February 2018, state and local community leaders were notified about the re-activation of the Homestead site. HHS began to shelter UAC at Homestead in March 2018, and continues to operate it as a temporary influx care facility.

Due to the crisis on the southern border, ORR is facing a dramatic spike in referrals of UAC. In FY 2019, ORR has already received referrals of over 32,000 UAC (as of March 30), which is an increase over FY 2018 of almost 50%. If this rate of referrals continues, ORR will care for the largest number of UAC in the program's history in FY 2019. Based on the anticipated growth pattern in referrals of UAC from DHS to HHS, HHS is preparing for the need for high bed capacity to continue.

HHS plans to expand bed capacity at the Homestead Temporary Shelter for Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) in Homestead, Florida from 2,350 to 3,200 beginning in mid-April of 2019 based on need resulting from a current increase in UAC referrals from DHS. Family separations that resulted from the Zero Tolerance Policy that ended in 2018 are not driving the continuing operation of Homestead. In addition, no children at Homestead are there due to the Zero Tolerance Policy.

Since opening in March 2018 over 10,200 UAC have been placed at the site and more than 8,000 have been discharged to a suitable sponsor.

As of April 30, 2019, there were approximately 2,200 UAC, ages 13-17, residing at Homestead. This number changes on a daily basis as children are referred mostly by DHS and others are released to an appropriate sponsor. Approximately 72 percent were male and 28 percent were female. UAC discharged from the Homestead facility in the last 30 days remained in care on average for 35 days. This number is subject to change frequently based on many factors. **No children were transferred to Homestead from the temporary influx shelter recently closed in Tornillo, Texas.**

HHS currently operates a network of over 168 shelters/programs in 23 states and has a proven track record of accountability and transparency for program operations, as well as being a good neighbor in the communities where shelters are located. In FY 2018 the overall average length of care for UAC in the program was 60 days. In Q2 of FY19 the average length of care for UAC in the program is approximately 66 days (January – March 2019). The overwhelming majority of UAC are released to suitable sponsors who are family members within the United States (U.S.) to await immigration hearings.

Unaccompanied alien children at Homestead Temporary Shelter:

The task of assigning each child to the most appropriate shelter is complex and done with great care. All UAC placed at the Homestead influx care facility are in the custody of HHS. Care and services for the children are provided by non-governmental organizations funded by HHS. Homestead operates as a temporary influx care facility on federal property and therefore is not required to obtain a license from state of Florida to operate. It is, however, subject to all applicable federal regulations and ORR policies and procedures. All staff at Homestead have undergone FBI fingerprint background checks. FBI fingerprint background checks are robust and provide relevant information sufficient to ensure child safety. It should be noted that shelters such as Homestead increase employment opportunities in localities where they are placed.

The adverse impact of these shelters on the local community is minimal. UAC remain under staff supervision at all times. HHS works in close coordination with local officials on security and safety of the children and community.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has provided HHS use of the facility while DOL assesses its future use of the property. HHS assumes full responsibility for the facility during its use, including wear and tear on buildings and grounds. The facility will revert to DOL upon DOL's request and the temporary use by HHS will have no bearing on DOL's decision about whether to resume Job Corps operations at this location. Currently DOL and HHS have a licensing agreement through June 2019.

Legal Services at Homestead:

Legal services are provided to UAC at Homestead in the same way that all UAC in permanent shelters receive them. UAC receive a *Know Your Rights* presentation and an individual legal screening within 7-10 days of admission into ORR care. Children who have to attend immigration court while in ORR care have an attorney who will provide representation either as the UAC's attorney of record or as Friend of Court.

Educational Services at Homestead:

The UAC do not attend local public schools. The Homestead education department offers all UAC a General Assessment Test to evaluate their knowledge for proper academic placement while at the facility. The placement test focuses on three major fields: Spanish, English, and Mathematics. Education instructors and lead teachers are supervised by certified teachers and required to be bilingual in English and Spanish, have a bachelor's degree and a clean criminal background check. At the Homestead temporary influx care facility, classes are part of the daily structure of the facility.

Security of the unaccompanied alien children:

While utilizing space at the Homestead Job Corps facility to temporarily shelter UAC, HHS arranges for the security of UAC. CHSi contractors provide on-site security 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Health of the unaccompanied alien children:

UAC receive an initial screening for visible and obvious health issues when they first arrive at U.S. Border Patrol facilities. Children must be considered "fit to travel" before they are moved from a border patrol station to an HHS-funded care provider.

UAC are medically screened and receive initial vaccinations within 48 hours of arriving at a HHS-funded care provider. The initial screening includes a general health assessment, including a mental health screening and a review of vaccination history. If a vaccination record is not located or a child is not up-to-date, the child receives all vaccinations recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Some health conditions may manifest after the UAC is transferred to an influx care facility. If a health issue arises, the UAC will receive prompt attention and medical care is provided.

About unaccompanied alien children:

Congress has defined a UAC as a child who (1) has no lawful immigration status in the United States; (2) has not attained 18 years of age; and, (3) with respect to whom, there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States, or no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody. *See* 6 U.S.C. § 279(g)(2).

HHS plays no role in the apprehension or initial detention of alien children prior to their referral to HHS custody. HHS, for example, does not separate alien children from their parents at the time of apprehension or during any period of detention prior to referral. HHS does not provide care or custody for adult aliens or family units that include adults.

By law, HHS provides care for each UAC who is referred to HHS custody by another federal department. HHS is not involved in caring for UACs prior to referral.

Most UAC are referred to ORR by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Some UAC may be referred to ORR because they were apprehended by immigration authorities while trying to cross the border. Others are referred after coming to the attention of DHS in the interior of the United States.

After referral, UAC remain in the care and custody of HHS until they are released to a suitable sponsor, usually a relative, while their immigration cases are adjudicated.

At this time, most UAC come primarily from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador.

Donation guidelines:

Members of the public have expressed interest in donating or volunteering to help unaccompanied alien children. There are several voluntary, community, faith-based or international organizations assisting unaccompanied children. You can find resources and contacts in your state at the following online address:

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/state-programs-annual-overview>