



**SUBJECT:** Unaccompanied Alien Children Program

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The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has established a temporary shelter for unaccompanied alien children (UAC) at U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Tornillo, Texas Land Port of Entry (LPOE).

The temporary shelter established at Tornillo has 3,800 beds for the children, with 1,400 of those beds on reserve status. Continuation of operation of the Tornillo temporary shelter is a necessary and prudent step to ensure that HHS has the capacity to provide appropriate care for the children while a suitable sponsor is identified and the Border Patrol can continue its vital national security mission to prevent illegal migration and trafficking, and to protect the borders of the United States.

The need for the continuation of the temporary operation at Tornillo is based on the number of UAC who crossed the border alone without their parent or legal guardian and are in HHS's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) care. Family separations that resulted from the Zero Tolerance Policy that ended on June 20, 2018, are not driving this need. No children who were a part of the family separations are at the Tornillo facility.

All UAC sheltered at the Tornillo LPOE site are in the custody of HHS, and all of the care and services is being provided by entities under grant or contract to HHS's Administration for Children and Families, which oversees ORR.

HHS operates a network of just over 100 shelters in 17 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. The average length of care for the children through the third quarter of FY 2018 was about 59 days. The overwhelming majority of the children are released to suitable sponsors who are family members within the United States while they await immigration hearings.

The task of assigning each child to the most appropriate shelter is complex and done with great care. As of November 15, 2018, there were about 1,800 UAC, ages 13-17, residing at Tornillo. Approximately 80 percent were male and 20 percent were female. UAC spend, on average, 25 days at Tornillo. Most are about to be released to a suitable sponsor.

UAC receive the following at Tornillo: an individual bed; care and supervision; case management; counseling; access to legal services; medical care; three meals a day and snacks; recreation; soccer; basketball; movies; arts and crafts; board games; televised sports events; religious services; an on-site barber; and private showers. Minors in the program receive

educational services from teachers under the oversight of an experienced senior public school administrator using textbooks and workbooks.

UAC residing in HHS shelters do not integrate into the local community and do not attend local schools. They remain under the supervision of shelter staff at all times.

A lease agreement with the General Services Administration is providing HHS temporary use of the site. HHS assumes full responsibility for the facility during its use, including wear and tear of the grounds.

**Security of the unaccompanied alien children:**

While using space at the Tornillo LPOE site to temporarily shelter UAC, HHS assumes full security responsibility for the children. HHS has on-site security 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The children have on average a supervision ratio of no more than 1 adult for every 8 children, 24 hours per day. This ratio does not include the additional security, medical, case management, education, recreation and operations personnel hired by HHS grantees/contractors to work with the UAC.

**Health of the unaccompanied alien children:**

UAC receive an initial screening for visible and obvious health issues when they first arrive at Border Patrol facilities. Children must be considered fit to travel before they are moved from the Border Patrol station to an HHS-funded facility.

The children are medically screened and vaccinated within 48 hours of arriving at a HHS facility. 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. Some health conditions may manifest after the child was transferred to a temporary facility. If a health issue arises while in our care, the child will receive prompt attention and the appropriate medical care will be provided.

**About unaccompanied alien children:**

By law, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has custody of and must provide care for each unaccompanied alien child referred to its care, defined as a child who has no lawful immigration status in the United States; has not attained 18 years of age; and, who does not have a parent or legal guardian in the United States, or there is 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 unaccompanied alien children prior to their referral to HHS custody.

UAC are referred to ORR by another federal agency, usually the Department of Homeland Security. Most children are placed into ORR care because they were apprehended by immigration authorities while trying to cross the border; others are referred after coming to the attention of immigration authorities at some point after crossing the border. The children are transferred to the care and custody of HHS until they are released to a suitable sponsor, usually a relative, while their immigration cases are adjudicated. The children 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>