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## **FACT SHEET**

### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Unaccompanied Alien Children sheltered at Carrizo Springs Site, Carrizo Springs, Texas**

Following the recent activation of the Carrizo Springs site in Carrizo Springs, Texas as a temporary emergency influx shelter for unaccompanied alien children (UAC), the first UAC safely arrived on June 30, 2019 and were welcomed by staff to the shelter designed for children.

The Carrizo Springs shelter was formerly used as a lodging facility and is expected to house up to 1,300 UAC. Teens, males and females ages 13-17, will be sheltered in hard sided structures that were renovated over the last month. Semi-permanent soft sided structures are being used for support operations.

BCFS Health and Human Services' Emergency Management Division (EMD) – a nationally recognized, non-profit, emergency management and response organization – is operating all components of shelter operations at the facility.

Due to the crisis on the southern border, ORR is facing a dramatic spike in referrals of UAC from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). As of June 10, DHS has referred over 52,000 UAC to HHS this fiscal year (FY), an increase of over 60 percent from FY 2018. Referrals in May, totaled 9,099 - one of the highest monthly totals in the history of the program. If these numbers continue, this fiscal year HHS will care for the largest number of UAC in the program's history.

Opening the Carrizo Springs shelter is 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 DHS. HHS is expanding bed capacity to ensure that it can keep pace. Based on the anticipated growth, HHS expects its need for additional bed capacity to continue, despite placing UAC with sponsors at historically high rates.

As soon as children enter ORR care, we put them in contact with their parents, guardians or relatives and begin the process of finding them a suitable sponsor, often a parent or a close family relative living in the United States. While we are looking for sponsors, children are provided age-appropriate care in one of the 168 facilities and programs operated in 23 states.

Today, there are approximately 13,200 UAC in HHS care. At the end of May 2019, the system-wide length of care in our shelters is 45 days, down from a recent high of 93 days in November 2018. ORR is

working to further reducing length of care, to deal with capacity issues, in ways that do not jeopardize the safety or welfare of the children.

The important work happening in each of the facilities and programs in our network around the country – work we have done successfully since 2003 as part of our legal mandate – takes an experienced team of competent, hardworking men and women dedicated to the welfare of the children.

Similar to other temporary shelter locations operated by HHS, facility visits are being offered and scheduled for elected officials, media and key stakeholders. HHS has a public information officer located at Carrizo Springs to interact with the media and community members.

### **Unaccompanied alien children at Carrizo Springs 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 Carrizo Springs influx care facility are in the custody of HHS. Care and services for the children are provided by non-governmental organizations funded by HHS. The facility is subject to all applicable federal regulations and ORR policies and procedures. All prospective staff at Carrizo Springs will undergo 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 the Carrizo Springs facility 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.

HHS assumes full leasing responsibility for the facility during its use, including wear and tear on buildings and grounds.

### **Legal Services at Carrizo Springs:**

Legal services will be provided to UAC at Carrizo Springs 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 Carrizo Springs:**

The UAC do not attend local public schools. All children at Carrizo Springs will receive 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 Carrizo Springs temporary influx care facility, classes will be part of the daily structure of the facility.

### **Security of the unaccompanied alien children:**

While utilizing space at the Carrizo Springs facility to temporarily shelter UAC, HHS arranges for the security of UAC. On-site security will be 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 will be 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>