

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Ranking Member Kathy Castor
Hearing on Insights from the HHS Inspector General on Oversight of Unaccompanied
Minors, Grant Management and CMS
April 18, 2023

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I appreciate you holding today's hearing and thank you, Inspector General Grimm for being here today.

HHS is responsible for administering numerous government programs that are essential for the safety and wellbeing of people across the country. And during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic, its role became even more prominent as we needed to coordinate a whole-of-government response. As HHS's programs have expanded in scope and size, I recognize that your job has become more challenging as well.

We are on the verge of another change in HHS's strategy: thanks to the leadership of President Biden and Congressional Democrats, we are on track to end the Public Health Emergency next month.

A few weeks ago, we had the opportunity to hear from Inspectors General for the EPA, Department of Energy, and Department of Commerce as to how they are overseeing deployment of funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and CHIPS and Science Act.

I'm very proud of our Committee's leadership in enacting these landmark laws. And we recognize the importance of good oversight to accompany the new and expanded programs that result. Democrats are dedicated to supporting both the agencies and their IGs with adequate resources so the great benefits these laws will bring for our communities are realized.

Without question, though, there are areas of shared concern. Members on both sides of the aisle were alarmed to read recent news reports of child labor exploitation involving children who had migrated to the U.S. without their parents and been placed with sponsors by the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement.

The administration has announced an interagency effort to expand its capacity to crack down on exploitative child labor, provide responsive post-release services to more children, and improve sponsor vetting. But additional reporting as recently as yesterday continues to make me concerned that there is still a long way to go and that children are falling through the cracks.

I look forward to hearing from Inspector General Grimm about what her team has found in their studies of HHS facilities and recommendations for making sure HHS can provide proper care for children in its facilities.

We know that long stays in federal facilities are detrimental to the health and well-being of children. It is essential that HHS constantly ensure that it is balancing the need to provide excellent care to children under ORR's custody while efficiently placing them with reliable sponsors in safe homes.

There are also lessons that have been learned thanks to the IG's work with NIH. Federally funded research has led to breakthroughs that help us fight deadly diseases, make advances in treatments and therapeutics, and develop lifesaving vaccines. Funding through NIH is a critical investment in Americans' health and well-being, and I am glad that the IG and NIH are working together to improve the agency's grant oversight where possible.

Oversight of NIH research funding is certainly important and we should be making sure that these dollars are well spent and well monitored. And I am confident that we can do that without vilifying individual scientists or tearing down our health institutions.

Politicizing a global pandemic that has killed more than one million of our family members, friends, and neighbors is dangerous and not a substitute for oversight and sensible policy reforms. So we need to make sure that our oversight efforts are focused on improving NIH and the success of its grantmaking work rather than limiting its ability to do important work, including with global partners.

This is also a critical time in pandemic recovery as the administration ends the public health emergency and again, Democrats are looking forward and taking this step responsibly by prioritizing efforts that make the nation's health infrastructure stronger, improve access to care for everyone, and invest in future pandemic preparedness.

I sincerely thank Inspector General Grimm's office for the important work they do to ensure program integrity at HHS and that these important goals are pursued in a way that makes best use of resources.

I yield back.