

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115
Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641
June 21, 2018

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I am writing to you to request that you begin an immediate audit of the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) and Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to track, and ultimately reunite with their families, children currently in the custody of the U.S. government due to the forced family separations resulting from the Administration's "zero-tolerance" immigration policy.

Between April 6, 2018 and June 20, 2018, DHS separated 2,342 child migrants from their parents and placed them into the custody of HHS' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). While I hope that President Trump's June 20 Executive Order will put an end to this immoral practice, that Order is entirely prospective, and does not speak to how the Administration will reunite the 2,342 children already separated from their families.

Reconnecting families is likely to be enormously difficult because adults and children have reportedly been placed into two separate systems.¹ The parents have been referred to DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ), while the children have been classified as "unaccompanied minors" and placed into the care of ORR. News reports indicate that many of these children have been sent to other parts of the country including New York and Michigan, while their parents are kept in detention centers in states such as Arizona and Texas.²

¹ *Fate of 2,300 separated children still unclear despite Trump's executive order*, The Guardian (June 21, 2018).

² *Hundreds of Separated Children Have Quietly Been Sent to New York*, New York Times (June 20, 2018); *Torn from immigrant parents, 8-month-old baby lands in Michigan*, Detroit Free Press (June 20, 2018).

Compounding this issue, many of the children torn from their families are infants and babies who are too young to communicate regarding who their parents are, or to identify their home countries. Moreover, news reports have indicated that in some cases, children who are able to communicate have not been able to speak with their parents because “the parents are detained and the agency can’t locate them.”³

To bring accountability and ensure these children are properly accounted for and ultimately reunited with their families, Congress needs an immediate assessment of the systems or processes by which ORR and DHS are tracking each minor in their care, as well as their respective parents or guardians from whom they were separated. I request that you immediately begin evaluating the following:

1. Does a master list exist of all children currently in the care of ORR custody?
2. How many children are in the care of ORR as a result of the forced separation policy? Where are these children being housed and what is the breakdown based on age and other demographics?
3. What formal systems or processes are ORR, DHS, DOJ, and any other relevant agencies using to coordinate and track each child that entered an ORR facility because of the forcible separation and its parents or guardians? Are these systems or processes able to effectively track each child and match them with those from whom they were separated?
 - a. Among all separated children in ORR’s custody, how effectively are ORR, DHS, DOJ, and any other relevant agencies tracking these separated children and matching them to their parents or guardians? To what extent are these agencies unable to track these separated children and their parents or guardians, and what actions are these agencies taking in those cases?
 - b. To what extent has the recent increase in the number of separated children affected these agencies’ abilities to effectively coordinate and track these children and their parents or guardians?
4. What systems or processes are ORR, DHS, DOJ, and any other relevant agencies using to reunite these children with their parents, guardians, or those from whom they were separated? Are these systems or processes able to successfully reunite each child with those from whom they were separated?
 - a. Among all separated children in ORR’s custody, how effectively are ORR, DHS, DOJ, and any other relevant agencies reuniting these separated children and their parents or guardians? To what extent are these agencies unable to reunite these separated children with their parents or guardians, and what actions are these

³ *Torn from immigrant parents, 8-month-old baby lands in Michigan*, Detroit Free Press (June 20, 2018).

agencies taking in those cases?

- b. To what extent has the recent increase in the number of separated children affected these agencies' abilities to effectively reunite these children and their parents or guardians?

I also have concerns about how ORR is providing adequate care to ensure the health and safety of these children, and will be in communication with your office regarding additional work to oversee those efforts. However, given that more than 2,300 separated children are in the custody of ORR shelters and their ongoing status remains unclear, I am asking that GAO begin this initial work immediately to evaluate how these agencies are tracking these children, so that Congress can be informed on what systems can or should be used to reunite these children with their families. If you have any questions, please contact Christina Calce or Jacquelyn Bolen of the Democratic Committee staff at 202-225-3641.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Frank Pallone, Jr." with a stylized flourish at the end.

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member