



THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS

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TOM COCHRAN

October 3, 2018

Alex M. Azar, II
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Azar,

I write on behalf of the nation's mayors to inquire into the way migrant children in your Department's care are being kept, the duration of their detention, and how they are being transported among facilities. Recent reporting raises several issues of concern and we expect that you are the best one to provide the answers.

We understand that the tent camp at Tornillo has been greatly expanded and that large numbers of children have been and are being moved there. We also understand that, unlike other facilities operated under contract to your Department, the tent camp is not being regulated for health and safety by local authorities and that the young people there are not being provided schooling.

There have been reports that children are being awakened during the night and quickly moved out of the facilities in which they are living, under cover of darkness. Like many, we are concerned this practice disrupts whatever stability these young people have been able to find and adds to the trauma they are facing.

We also understand that they are being kept in detention far longer than has been the practice in the past and that this may be due, in part, to the screening now being done, which is discouraging family members and other potential sponsors from coming forward to accept them because of fear of deportation.

While we recognize that you are responsible for managing a difficult situation, these are children and we must put their wellbeing first. We look forward to your response to the concerns raised above and hope you can provide some clarity. We do not want to see this grow into the avoidable nightmare that so many immigrant children and their parents faced this summer, and which more than hundred children still face.

Sincerely,

Stephen K. Benjamin
Mayor of Columbia
President