



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Assistant Secretary for Legislation
Washington, DC 20201

July 2, 2018

The Honorable Chuck Grassley
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte
Chairman
U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Grassley and Chairman Goodlatte:

We understand the increased congressional interest in the services that HHS-funded facilities provide to unaccompanied alien children through our Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and we appreciate the importance of continued transparency and the critical oversight role of Congress. This increased interest, however, has created resource constraints that are threatening to impact ORR's ability to quickly reunite the children in our care with a parent or safely place them with a sponsor.

To date, nearly 500 work hours have been spent facilitating congressional visits to facilities for more than 70 Members of Congress. Many of these hours would otherwise have been spent by ORR field and grantee staff verifying parental relationships to prevent child trafficking, facilitating check-in calls between parents and children, facilitating and reviewing foster family home studies, coordinating the delivery of food and medical supplies, and many other duties vital to the health and welfare of the children.

Because we share the same belief that the well-being of the children in HHS care is the top priority, I am hopeful that we can work together to better balance Member interest with the safety and operations of our facilities.

ORR's longstanding policy for facility visits continues to be that all requests must be submitted at least two weeks before the requested visit date and that "visits will be confirmed based upon shelter availability, taking into account privacy concerns at site locations." To manage the high demand for visitation requests in a shorter turnaround time, HHS has worked with grantees and interested Member offices to provide pre-arranged visitation dates and locations for any Member wishing to attend. Priority for Member participation in any of these pre-arranged visits is first for those Members who have not recently been to a facility and then on a first-come, first-served basis.

As the Chairmen of the Committees of jurisdiction over ORR, we respectfully request your assistance in working with HHS to facilitate Member visitation requests. We believe that you could play an important leadership role in coordinating Members who are interested in

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visiting the same facilities and encouraging them to do so as a group, as well as help get the word out about upcoming opportunities for visits made available by HHS. These actions will greatly alleviate the burdens on ORR field staff so that they can maintain their focus on the children in our care.

Thank you for your assistance and understanding. Should you or your staff have questions, I can be reached at (202) 690-7627 or matthew.bassett@hhs.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Matthew D. Bassett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and "B".

Matthew D. Bassett
Assistant Secretary for Legislation