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May 12, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to express grave concern about the ongoing crisis at our Southern border. I have become aware that your Administration has sought to recruit a 'volunteer force' of Federal employees to help address the surge of migrants. Your Administration has been touting its recent ability to transfer migrants from CBP custody to HHS custody as a success, but your need to recruit this volunteer force demonstrates again that the Federal government lacks the capacity to deal with this crisis.

On March 16, 2021, Secretary Mayorkas noted that more than 560 U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees have been detailed to the Southern border to assist U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in processing unaccompanied children (UACs).¹ Since then, I have seen reports in the news that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) have sent emails to their workforce requesting that they consider details to the Southern border to serve as a member of the 'volunteer force.'² In addition to these requests for detailed employees, I am aware of at least one USA Jobs posting requesting volunteers to help the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) at HHS process UACs.³

On April 30, 2021, there were 22,577 UACs in ORR custody.⁴ On April 30, 2020, HHS reported that there were only 13,316 UACs in ORR custody.⁵ This means that ORR has seen a nearly 70 percent increase in the numbers of UACs that are in its custody. U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported

¹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Statement by Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro N. Mayorkas Regarding Situation at the Southwest Border*. March 16, 2021. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2021/03/16/statement-homeland-security-secretary-alejandro-n-mayorkas-regarding-situation>.

² Michael Ruiz, *NASA employees reportedly asked to volunteer to work with unaccompanied migrant children*, Fox News. Apr. 6, 2021. <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/nasa-employees-unaccompanied-migrant-children>.; Amber Athey, *Exclusive: Biden admin sending 500 USDA employees to assist with border crisis*, Spectator US. Apr. 29, 2021. <https://spectator.us/topic/leaked-documents-biden-administration-usda-border-crisis/>.

³ USAJobs.gov, *Field Program Specialist, Detail*. <https://www.usajobs.gov/GetJob/ViewDetails/596318100/>.

⁴ Email from U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Legislative Affairs, *Data on Unaccompanied Children Daily Report - April 30, 2021*.

⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Latest UC Data – FY2020*. <https://www.hhs.gov/programs/social-services/unaccompanied-children/latest-uc-data-fy2020/index.html>.

that it has apprehended 17,171 UACs in April 2021 and 18,890 during March 2021.⁶ Even Secretary Mayorkas has conceded that our government is seeing a 20-year high in the number of UACs crossing the Southwest border this year.⁷


Emails leaked to the media suggest that the Administration is overwhelmed by the number of UACs in HHS custody. Federal employees are told that they can receive a detail of up-to three months to help HHS manage this crisis. The leaked emails also note that this detail is indefinitely renewable, suggesting that your Administration recognizes this historic surge in migrants will not slow for the foreseeable future.⁸ I am aware of over 560 employees being detailed from DHS and another 500 being detailed from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.⁹ Relocating more than 1,000 employees show that we either have serious workforce inefficiencies in our Federal government or their absence must be causing a significant strain on the budgets and missions of their home agencies.

The significant number of detailees your Administration has requested represent a significant workforce and budgetary transfer from other Federal agencies to border enforcement. Rather than funding border security outright, your Administration has transferred the burdens of your open border policies to other agencies that also have critical missions.

The leaked emails also suggest that those who are accepted for details to the Southern border are not receiving the specialized training necessary to work with detained UACs. As you are aware, many UACs experience significant trauma during the journey to our border. I am concerned that natural resources experts from the USDA and scientists from NASA do not have the specialization necessary to preserve the wellbeing of UACs in HHS custody.

Rather than diverting resources from other agencies and Federal personnel, you should instead acknowledge that we are confronted with a national security and humanitarian crisis and resume and complete construction of the border wall, enforce the law at our Southern border, and work with Congress to fix our broken asylum system.

In God We Trust,



JAMES LANKFORD
United States Senator

⁶U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Southwest Land Border Encounters, May 11, 2021. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *supra*.

⁸ Amber Athey, *supra*.

⁹ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *supra*; Amber Athey, *supra*.