

# United States Senate

March 4, 2019

The Honorable Daniel R. Levinson  
Inspector General  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Office of Inspector General  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Inspector General Levinson:

I write today to express my grave concerns about the thousands of reported sexual abuse allegations against unaccompanied minors (“UACs”) while in the care of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (“ORR”) and its contracted shelters.<sup>1</sup> These allegations are egregious and inexcusable. While I understand that there is an ongoing investigation into the health and safety of children in ORR custody, I urge the Office of Inspector General to investigate any additional allegations and to keep Congress apprised of your findings.<sup>2</sup>

According to internal agency documents received by Axios, the Department of Health and Human Services (“HHS”) has received more than 4,500 complaints of sexual abuse against UACs from 2014 to 2018 and another 1,300 complaints were referred to the Department of Justice.<sup>3</sup> Within these thousands of allegations, almost two hundred are contractor staff-on-minor allegations of sexual assault.<sup>4</sup> These allegations range from reports of inappropriate relationships with minors to unwanted physical touching of a sexual nature.<sup>5</sup> Disturbingly, reports such as this are not new—allegations of sexual abuse of minors in ORR custody have continued for years.<sup>6</sup>

There must be an enforceable zero-tolerance policy for sexual abuse and misconduct for all shelters housing children. As you may know, unaccompanied children who have experienced violence in their home countries are extremely vulnerable and are at heightened risk of sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Caitlin Owens, Stef W. Kight, Harry Stevens, *Thousands of migrant youth allegedly suffered sexual abuse in U.S. custody*, Axios (February 26, 2019), <https://www.axios.com/immigration-unaccompanied-minors-sexual-assault-3222e230-29e1-430f-a361-d959c88c5d8c.html>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General, *ORR-Funded Facilities' Efforts to Ensure Health and Safety of Unaccompanied Children*, <https://oig.hhs.gov/reports-and-publications/workplan/summary/wp-summary-0000304.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> Owens, *supra* note 1.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Refugee Resettlement, *Unaccompanied Alien Children Program Sexual Abuse Allegations Reported to DOJ Fiscal Year 2015 through 2018*, <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/5751021/NadUAC1213-Sexual-Assaults-by-Date-of-Incident.pdf>.

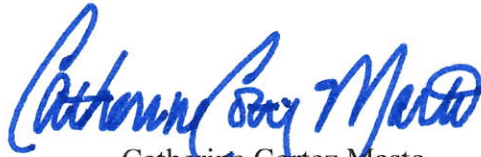
<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Susan Carroll, *Crossing alone: Children fleeing to U.S. land in shadowy system*, Houston Chronicle (May 24, 2014), <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/investigations/article/Crossing-alone-Children-fleeing-to-U-S-land-in-5503127.php>.

abuse.<sup>7</sup> Given the seriousness and systemic nature of these allegations, I am requesting a briefing as soon as possible on the status of the Office of Inspector General investigation and the extent to which the agency documents that detail the aforementioned allegations have been or will be included in your investigation.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this request.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto  
United States Senator

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *A child is a child: protecting Children on the move from violence, abuse and exploitation* (May 2017), [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_A\\_child\\_is\\_a\\_child\\_May\\_2017\\_EN.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_A_child_is_a_child_May_2017_EN.pdf).