

U.S. Rep. Grothman: Introduces bill to protect migrant children

Posted on Tuesday, Aug 1, 2023

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

(Washington, D.C.) – Congressmen Glenn Grothman (WI-06) and Lance Gooden (TX-05) have introduced H.R. 4869, the *Migrant Child Safety Act*, a bill to protect unaccompanied migrant children inside the United States by accurately identifying and screening sponsors.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is tasked with placing unaccompanied migrant children with sponsors **deemed capable of caring for the child's well-being**. However, [reports](#) indicate that ORR has prioritized the speedy release of unaccompanied migrant children rather than their safety. As a result, thousands of migrant children have been placed with sponsors that have no relation to the child or may be in the country illegally. What's more, the ORR has [lost contact with 85,000 children](#) they have placed with these sponsors.

“President Biden’s reckless open-border policies have created the worst humanitarian crisis at the Southern border in our nation’s history. Make no mistake, this is a crisis that both empowers the cartels and encourages the trafficking of migrant children into the United States,” said Grothman. “Unprecedented levels of illegal border crossings, incentivized by the Biden Administration’s policies, have led to historic encounters of unaccompanied migrant children that have overwhelmed ORR and endangered migrant children.

“These children are already subject to heinous abuses by Mexican Drug Cartels on their journey to America, but once they enter the country, the Biden Administration’s lackluster ORR is rushing to send kids off with poorly-vetted sponsors they are often not related to. Instead of channeling children to uncertain or possibly dangerous living conditions, my bill will ensure that ORR is better equipped to reunite these children with a parent or locate a dependable sponsor to

care for their safety.

“How in the world can the Biden Administration claim to care about families if they are admitting countless children into our country without making every effort reuniting these kids with their parents?”

“If President Biden truly cared about the well-being of migrants, he would show tremendous concern for the thousands of migrant children who are suffering because of his policies. We cannot adequately protect and defend migrant children, Border Patrol agents, or American communities until we take back control of the border and replace our broken system with one that is thoughtful and in the best interest of prospective immigrants.”

*“The current state of affairs within the Office of Refugee Resettlement is unacceptable,” **said Congressman Gooden.** “The children in their care are not products to be processed and discharged hastily. The Migrant Child Safety Act will address rampant disregard for the well-being of migrant children through stricter processing procedures. This legislation will put stringent checks and balances in place to ensure children are placed with familial relations and not in the hands of human traffickers.”*

Background Information

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is required by law to promptly place Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) referred to its custody by the Department of Homeland Security with sponsors deemed capable of caring for the child's well-being. However, reports indicate that ORR has prioritized expedient releases of UACs to the detriment of their safety in some instances. In addition to migrant children living in unfavorable and sometimes inhumane conditions due to ORR's malfeasance, the agency has [lost more than 85,000 migrant children](#) in the past two years.

Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Becerra, who oversees ORR, personally pushed for faster processing and discharging of UAC to the detriment of the children's safety on multiple occasions, pressuring staff at ORR to treat UAC processing like a factory:

“If Henry Ford had seen this in his plants, he would have never become famous and rich. This is not the way you do an assembly line.” – HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra.

These reports cite evidence that as many as two-thirds of UACs have been exploited by sponsors and forced to work illegal, full-time jobs in hazardous conditions to pay off smuggling debts to cartels.

Caseworkers within ORR claim that HHS regularly ignored obvious signs of labor exploitation, such as:

- single sponsors sponsoring multiple UAC;
- “hot spots” in the country where the vast majority of UAC sponsors are not the children’s parents;
- UAC with significant debts;
- direct reports of trafficking.

Specifically, this bill would:

- Require ORR to collect information from sponsors including name, contact information, DOB, birthplace, SSN, proof of address, immigration status, and results of background checks.
- Require sponsors to prove their familial relation to a UAC through documentation, witnesses, and/or DNA testing.
- Require ORR to report a UAC as missing to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children 120 days after placement if:
 - ORR is unable to contact the sponsor for a follow-up or well-being check;
 - or
 - The sponsor does not contact ORR for a follow-up or well-being check.
- Require ORR to notify the appropriate State or local health or welfare agency within 30 days of placing a UAC with a sponsor in their jurisdiction.