

MIKE CRAPO, IDAHO, CHAIRMAN

CHUCK GRASSLEY, IOWA
JOHN CORNYN, TEXAS
JOHN THUNE, SOUTH DAKOTA
TIM SCOTT, SOUTH CAROLINA
BILL CASSIDY, LOUISIANA
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
STEVE DAINES, MONTANA
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA
JOHN BARRASSO, WYOMING
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN
THOM TILLIS, NORTH CAROLINA
MARSHA BLACKBURN, TENNESSEE
ROGER MARSHALL, KANSAS

RON WYDEN, OREGON
MARIA CANTWELL, WASHINGTON
MICHAEL F. BENNET, COLORADO
MARK R. WARNER, VIRGINIA
SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, RHODE ISLAND
MAGGIE HASSAN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO, NEVADA
ELIZABETH WARREN, MASSACHUSETTS
BERNARD SANDERS, VERMONT
TINA SMITH, MINNESOTA
BEN RAY LUJÁN, NEW MEXICO
RAPHAEL G. WARNOCK, GEORGIA
PETER WELCH, VERMONT

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6200

GREGG RICHARD, STAFF DIRECTOR
JOSHUA SHEINKMAN, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

April 8, 2026

Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Alex J. Adams
Assistant Secretary for Family Support
Administration for Children & Families
330 C Street SW, 4th Floor
Washington, DC 20201

Secretary Kennedy and Assistant Secretary Adams,

I write regarding the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS or Department) diminished capacity to identify, respond to, and prevent trafficking and exploitation of children in its custody, particularly unaccompanied children referred to the Administration for Children & Families' Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Specifically, sources indicate continued staff reductions, diminished operational capacity, and a sharp decline in trafficking-related determinations within the Department. Congress entrusted the HHS Secretary with critical responsibilities under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA)¹, as amended, and the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA)², yet current structures, staffing, and resources appear insufficient to meet those obligations. These alarming allegations suggest the Secretary is failing to adequately protect vulnerable children under his care.

Under the TVPA, the Secretary of HHS, acting through ORR, is responsible for determining whether a child (under the age of 18) in the United States is eligible for benefits and services as a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons.³ This authority is implemented through the

¹ 22 U.S.C. § 7101, et seq.

² Pub. L. 110-457, 122 Stat. 5044 (2008).

³ 22 U.S.C. §§ 7105(b)(1)(A), (C).

Office on Trafficking in Persons (OTIP), which carries out these functions within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and issues an “Eligibility Letter” to confirmed child victims, enabling access to benefits and services to the same extent as refugees.⁴ Further, the TVPRA requires HHS to act promptly upon credible information that a child may have been subjected to trafficking and authorizes the provision of interim assistance to ensure immediate access to services while eligibility determinations are pending.⁵

These statutory protections are mandatory and constitute the core safeguards Congress established to ensure rapid identification and protection of child trafficking victims.

At the same time, ORR requires care providers to report suspected trafficking or exploitation within 24 hours to appropriate stakeholders, including OTIP, and to coordinate, as appropriate, with law enforcement and child welfare agencies.⁶ These processes require timely referral, tracking, and adjudication supported by adequate staffing and functioning systems within ACF.

Recent stakeholder accounts indicate that these processes are not functioning as intended, with reports of significantly reduced staffing and diminished operational capacity within ORR and OTIP, only three full-time equivalent (FTE) political appointees within OTIP, a reduction of direct-service OTIP grant recipients to 17 in fiscal year (FY) 2025, discontinued key performance indicator tracking for the National Human Trafficking Hotline, and a sharp decline in trafficking-related determinations. If true, these conditions would raise serious questions about HHS’s ability to meet its legal obligations under the TVPA and TVPRA and to prioritize the care and safety of vulnerable children.

Given the importance of these responsibilities, I am requesting detailed information on how ACF is ensuring effective coordination, staffing, and oversight between ORR and OTIP. Specifically, provide the following no later than April 17, 2026:

Coordination and Data Sharing

1. A detailed description of current policies, procedures, and protocols for information-sharing between ORR and OTIP, including how suspected child trafficking cases are referred, tracked, and adjudicated.
2. All data-sharing agreements, memoranda of understanding, or standard operating procedures governing coordination between ORR and OTIP.
3. A detailed explanation of how ACF ensures compliance with the requirement that suspected trafficking concerns be reported within 24 hours.

Staffing and Organizational Capacity

⁴ 22 U.S.C. § 7105(b)(1)(G)(iv).

⁵ Pub. L. 110-457, §212; 22 U.S.C. § 7105(b)(1)(G)(i)-(iii).

⁶ *See e.g.*, ORR Unaccompanied Alien Children Bureau Policy Guide, §§ 2.8.1 & 3.2.1.

4. The total number of FTE staff, vacancies, and detailees (including originating office) assigned to OTIP and ORR, respectively, from January 20, 2025, to the present. Include their roles/titles and assigned divisions.
5. The total number of staff within OTIP specifically assigned to child trafficking eligibility determinations and processing Requests for Assistance (RFAs), disaggregated by month, between January 2025 and March 2026.
6. All organizational charts for OTIP and ORR between January 20, 2025, to the present.
7. Any staffing reductions, reassignments, or hiring freezes affecting OTIP or trafficking-related functions since January 2025, including all associated communications and decision memoranda.

Case Referrals, Determinations, and Outcomes

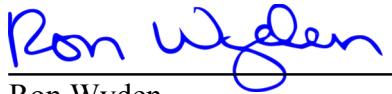
8. The total number of unaccompanied children in ORR custody, disaggregated by month, since January 20, 2025, and, among those in custody, the number for whom an RFA was submitted to OTIP.
9. The total number of unaccompanied children released from ORR custody to sponsors for whom, during post-release services or anytime thereafter, (1) a referral was made to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), (2) an RFA was submitted to OTIP, and/or (3) a Notice of Concern was filed, disaggregated by month, the number of days since the unaccompanied child had been released from ORR custody, sponsor category, and referral type.
10. The total number of RFAs submitted on behalf of unaccompanied children since January 20, 2025, disaggregated by month, referral source, and allegation type, and specify how many were processed through OTIP's case management system, Shepherd.
11. The total number of Interim Assistance Letters and Eligibility Letters issued during that same period, disaggregated by month, and the number of cases denied, pending, withdrawn, or administratively closed and the reason for each disposition.
12. The average and median time to adjudicate both Interim Assistance and Eligibility determinations.

Monitoring and Compliance

13. All audits, reports, memoranda, internal reviews, or evaluations conducted since January 2025 assessing ORR or OTIP compliance with trafficking-related reporting and response requirements under the TVPA and TVPRA.
14. The metrics used by ACF since January 20, 2025, to evaluate the effectiveness of trafficking identification, referral, and response systems.
15. All identified gaps in staffing, resources, or interagency coordination that affect ACF's ability to carry out its responsibilities under the TVPA and TVPRA, and the steps being taken to address those gaps.

The safety and well-being of children under the Secretary's care must be paramount. Congress established clear statutory requirements to ensure that children who may have experienced trafficking are promptly identified and provided access to services. Failure to fully implement these requirements would represent an abdication of the Secretary's obligations under the law to protect vulnerable children.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden

United States Senator

Ranking Member, Committee
on Finance