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May 12, 2026

T. March Bell
Inspector General
Department of Health and Human Services
330 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Inspector General Bell,

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS or Department) Office of Inspector General (OIG) was established to provide independent oversight of the Department, including its leadership. At a moment when unaccompanied children in the care and custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) are being held for nearly half a year on average,¹ when adolescents have reported being confined alone in “red rooms,”² and when a three-year-old in ORR’s care was sexually abused³ and HHS Secretary Kennedy claimed ignorance at a Finance Committee hearing, that oversight has never been more necessary. It also appears to have largely stopped.

The conditions that warrant your office’s attention are well-documented and growing more severe. The average length of care for children discharged from ORR has climbed from 37 days in January 2025 to 194 days in March 2026, an over five-fold increase in a single year.⁴ Category 1 sponsor applications, those filed by a parent or legal guardian and required by ORR’s own policy to be processed within ten (10) calendar days of receipt, are routinely going months without movement, forcing legal service providers to file habeas corpus petitions on behalf of

¹ ORR, Data: Released to Sponsors, <https://acf.gov/orr/about/ucs/facts-and-data> (last updated April 10, 2026).

² Ana Ley, *Migrant Children Removed From New York Shelter After Abuse Allegations*, THE N.Y. TIMES (Apr. 18, 2026), <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/04/18/nyregion/migrant-children-shelter-abuse.html>.

³ Valerie Gonzalez, *3-year-old immigrant suffered alleged sexual abuse during months in federal custody, family says*, ASSOCIATED PRESS (Apr. 5, 2026), <https://apnews.com/article/immigration-texas-trump-detention-abuse-b799ace25087c594339298685438e888>.

⁴ ORR, *supra* note 1.

children detained an average of more than 225 days.⁵ ORR has restructured its case management under a new Division of Sponsor Administration⁶ in a way that has cut off communication with the legal service providers and child advocates who would otherwise surface placement concerns and abuse, the same opacity that allowed a three-year-old's sexual abuse in ORR custody to go unreported to her father for nearly five months while ORR sat on a sponsor application its own policy required it to process within ten (10) calendar days.⁷ Moreover, ORR's sponsor records and post-release contact systems are reportedly being exploited to assist the U.S. Department of Homeland Security in locating, arresting, and deporting the very families ORR previously vetted.⁸ These are structural failures of a federal child-welfare program, and precisely the kind of failures OIG is charged with identifying and acting on independently.

OIG's recent oversight of a program in this state of crisis is wholly insufficient. OIG issued an issue brief in March 2024 synthesizing 16 years of oversight findings on the Unaccompanied Children Program and identifying persistent, recurring challenges with safeguarding child well-being, sponsor vetting, and case management.⁹ That brief provided a critical snapshot of a program in need of sustained oversight. It was also, apparently, among the last substantive ORR-focused work OIG has undertaken. A review of OIG's current active work plan shows only two ORR-related projects with 2024 start notices, both narrowly scoped to background check compliance at unlicensed facilities and National Call Center responses.¹⁰ There is no active OIG project examining the dramatic increase in Category 1 detention times, the collapse of the Federal Field Specialist communication and accountability structure, or the conditions in ORR-contracted foster placements in states where, as in Texas, facilities are not subject to state licensure and referrals to child protective services go unaddressed. That gap is itself a troubling finding about OIG's priorities. Furthermore, dozens of prior OIG recommendations addressing the very failures now producing harm, including incident reporting, placement oversight, and case management documentation, have been closed on paper, while the conditions that prompted

⁵ Pratheek Rebala, Jeff Ernsthause & Perla Trevizo, "Immigrants Who Say Their Detention Is Illegal Have Filed More Than 18,000 Cases. It's a Historic High," *PROPUBLICA & THE TEXAS TRIBUNE* (Feb. 10, 2026).

⁶ ORR Field Guidance 24, ORR Division of Sponsor Administration Role Guidance, https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/orr/FG-24_ORR-Division-of-Sponsor-Administration-Role-Guidance.pdf (last updated Jan. 26, 2026).

⁷ Gonzalez, *supra* note 3.

⁸ See e.g., *Diego N. v. HHS*, No. 1:26-cv-0055-UNA (D.D.C. filed Feb. 23, 2026); *L.G.M.L. v. Noem*, No. 1:25-cv-02942-TJK (D.D.C. filed Feb. 24, 2026).

⁹ HHS Office of Inspector General, *Issue Brief: Insights from OIG's Work on the Office of Refugee Resettlement's Efforts to Care for Unaccompanied Children* (Mar. 2024), <https://oig.hhs.gov/reports/all/2024/issue-brief-insights-from-oigs-work-on-the-office-of-refugee-resettlements-efforts-to-care-for-unaccompanied-children/>.

¹⁰ HHS Office of Inspector General, Active Work Plan Projects: Review of the Office of Refugee Resettlement's National Call Center Response to Incoming Calls, No. OEI-07-24-00370 (announced Aug. 15, 2024); Audit of the Office of Refugee Resettlement's Monitoring of Compliance With Employee Background Check Requirements for Unaccompanied Children Program Care Providers That Are No Longer State Licensed, No. A-06-24-07001 (announced Apr. 1, 2024), <https://oig.hhs.gov/reports/work-plan/browse-work-plan-projects/?search=unaccompanied&status=ACTIVE> (last visited Apr. 30, 2026).

them persist, suggesting HHS's compliance efforts are performative at best and deliberately obstructive at worst.

I am also writing to Secretary Kennedy today laying out the present-day record at HHS and the document requests it requires. The conditions described in that letter are precisely the kind of conditions OIG was created to surface independently of HHS leadership. Closing recommendations on paper while the underlying conditions persist is not oversight. It is a record-keeping exercise that gives the Department political cover for continued non-compliance.

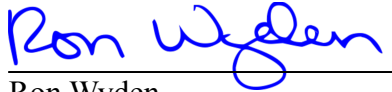
I therefore request written responses and documentation, no later than **June 5, 2026**, on the following:

OIG Work Plan and Oversight Activities

1. Provide a complete accounting of all active OIG work plan projects related to the Unaccompanied Children Program, including any projects underway but not yet publicly posted, and identify the date on which OIG last conducted a site visit or program assessment of ORR foster care placements, and the date on which OIG last reviewed ORR compliance with its Category 1 release timeline requirements.
2. Identify whether OIG has received any referrals or complaints related to the conditions described in recent public reporting concerning the safety of children in ORR care and custody between January 20, 2025, and the present, including prolonged detention of children with Category 1 sponsors and abuse in ORR-contracted foster placements, and if so, describe what action has been taken and the current status of any review.
3. Provide a complete list of all OIG recommendations related to the Unaccompanied Children Program that were closed between January 20, 2025, and the present, the basis for closure, and whether the underlying conditions that prompted each recommendation have been independently verified as resolved as opposed to unimplemented due to no longer being feasible. If such recommendations were closed because OIG determined that recommendation implementation is no longer a feasible option, provide detailed rationale of why such recommendation is no longer feasible, and how that determination was made.
4. Given the documented deterioration in Category 1 release timelines, delays with the release of unaccompanied children broadly, and the harm to children resulting from prolonged detention in inadequately supervised placements, I request that OIG immediately review ORR's compliance with its own release timeline policies and its oversight of contracted foster care placements, and provide an updated work plan reflecting that commitment no later than **June 5, 2026**.

OIG's independence from HHS leadership is precisely what gives your office its statutory authority and public legitimacy. The current workplan does not reflect that independence and children are being harmed because of it.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden

United States Senator

Ranking Member, Committee
on Finance