

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 25, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.  
Secretary of Health and Human Services  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Burgum and Secretary Kennedy,

On February 18, 2025, the Department of the Interior, in conjunction with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services, mandated an immediate cessation of legal services for unaccompanied immigrant children. Mere days later, on February 21, 2025, the Administration rescinded the stop-work order. While we welcome the rescission of this ill-advised order, the Administration's capricious actions have generated confusion and distress for the organizations that provide these critical legal services, as well as for unaccompanied minors. The abrupt and unconscionable decision to issue a stop-work order jeopardized the welfare of scores of vulnerable minors nationwide, stripping them of essential legal representation and support at a time when they need it most. The unaccompanied child legal services program contract is under an option year that ends in late March. We call upon you to renew this contract and maintain the funding and support necessary for these vital programs going forward.

Unaccompanied children arriving at our borders often embark on perilous journeys to escape unthinkable violence, exploitation, and extreme poverty in their countries of origin. These young individuals, lacking parental guidance, confront a labyrinthine immigration system upon arrival in the United States. Without competent legal representation, they face prolonged detention in facilities ill-suited for children and the looming threat of deportation to the very dangers they fled. Expecting a child to navigate complex legal proceedings unaided is not only patently unjust but also a flagrant violation of their fundamental rights.

The stop-work order issued on February 18 required the Acacia Center for Justice and its subcontractors to immediately cease work on a \$200 million contract to provide representation

for children entering the country alone.<sup>1</sup> According to press reports, some 85 organizations nationwide are part of Acacia's network that assist immigrant children under age 18. Through the contract, roughly 26,000 migrant children have legal representation, although another approximately 100,000 receive some kind of legal advice — frequently in the form of presentations from lawyers to the children while confined to government-run shelters after arriving in the United States.<sup>2</sup> In our state of Massachusetts, several hundred unaccompanied minors stood to lose their lawyers, with the more than 2,000 children who receive services short of full representation also facing the loss of assistance.

For decades, esteemed organizations across the nation have steadfastly provided indispensable legal services, social support, and foster care to these at-risk minors. The recent stop-work order egregiously undermined this longstanding commitment to child welfare and due process. Maintaining and renewing the unaccompanied child legal services program contract is critical for fulfilling our legal obligations and abiding by the foundational principles of justice and compassion that define our nation.

To help us better understand the Administration's decision-making regarding the unaccompanied child legal services program contract, please respond in writing to the following questions by March 11, 2025:

1. What was the internal decision-making process that led to the issuance of the February 18 stop-work order? Which officials within the Department of the Interior, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Health and Human Services were involved in reviewing and approving this directive?
2. What specific legal, policy, or budgetary considerations were cited as the rationale for initially terminating legal services for unaccompanied immigrant children? Was a formal impact assessment conducted before this decision was made? If so, please provide a copy? If not, why not?
3. Prior to issuing the stop-work order, were affected organizations, legal service providers, child welfare experts, or other stakeholders consulted about the potential consequences of this decision? If so, please provide documentation of these discussions and any recommendations made. If not, why not?
4. What was the internal decision-making process that led to the rescission of the February 18 stop-work order? Which officials within the Department of the Interior, Department of Homeland Security, and Department of Health and Human Services were involved in reviewing and approving this rescission?

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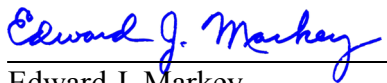
<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Santana et al., *Trump administration halts legal aid for migrant children, leaving some to navigate courts alone*, AP (Feb. 19, 2025), <https://apnews.com/article/trump-legal-aid-unaccompanied-children-immigration-court-5b5573cc022ebfdf8dc6b961bfcc0768>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*


5. Has the Department of the Interior or the Department of Health and Human Services developed a position regarding the renewal of the unaccompanied child legal services program contract?

The unaccompanied child legal services program contract directly impacts the lives and futures of thousands of minors. We urge you to renew this contract. It is incumbent upon us to uphold the rights and dignity of this most vulnerable group.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



Stephen F. Lynch  
Member of Congress



Jake Auchincloss  
Member of Congress



William R. Keating  
Member of Congress



Seth Moulton  
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan  
Member of Congress



Richard E. Neal  
Member of Congress



Ayanna Pressley  
Member of Congress

Katherine M. Clark

Katherine M. Clark

Member of Congress