



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

March 23, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As Governor of Texas, I write to you regarding the surge in illegal border crossings and the escalating humanitarian crisis at the border, including the threat of human traffickers who prey on, exploit, and abuse unaccompanied minors. Recent decisions by your administration are emboldening dangerous cartels, smugglers, and human traffickers to ramp up their criminal operations. In many cases, these criminals entice unaccompanied minors into inhumane conditions and expose them to abuse and terror.

So far this year, more than 11,000 minors have been apprehended crossing the border into Texas. From January to February, the number children crossing the border rose by 60 percent. In February alone, more than 9,400 children were apprehended crossing the border into Texas. Those numbers continue to increase in March, with no end in sight.

We have a duty to investigate these border crossings so we can protect the victims of human trafficking that have already crossed our borders, crack down on the perpetrators of this heinous crime, and ensure federal policies do not allow—or even incentivize—such behavior. We must send a clear message to these criminals that human trafficking will not be tolerated in America, and that we will use every available resource to stop this abuse of basic human rights.

However, it remains unclear if your administration is investigating how these children arrived here, what conditions they faced on their dangerous journeys across the border, or what assurance exists that they are not being smuggled or trafficked into a tragic situation in this country.

Americans need answers:

- How are these children coming across the border and who is helping them get here?
- Were these children abused or harmed in any way on their journeys?
- Were these children forced to carry contraband into the United States?
- Were these children or their families assisted, coerced, and threatened by cartel members or human traffickers?
- Are these children being effectively screened by appropriately trained personnel to identify potential victims of abuse, assault, and trafficking? What is the screening tool being used? When is that screening taking place and by whom? Are these children being provided a thorough medical screening that may separately identify abuse and assault?
- How many victims of physical abuse, sexual assault, or trafficking has your administration identified?
- Are you using effective DNA tests to confirm familial relations? How else are you ensuring that these children are being released to safe, trustworthy adults?
- What specific measures can you point to that confirm that these children are not released to human traffickers in the United States?
- What action is your administration taking to prosecute those who traffic unaccompanied minors?

Americans deserve to know what your administration is doing to get answers to these questions and to go after human traffickers.

As U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas said on Sunday: “these children travel a dangerous journey; so many don’t make it safely.” This is why I urge you and your administration to interview every unaccompanied minor coming across the border to determine if any child has been harmed, groomed, or victimized by human traffickers in any way. This information can help us root out human traffickers and prevent other children from being victimized.

To be clear, this is the federal government’s responsibility. However, in the absence of federal action, the State of Texas recently launched Operation Lone Star to secure the border and combat the smuggling of people and drugs into Texas. After hearing of the horrendous crimes committed against unaccompanied minors, I have now expanded the scope of Operation Lone Star to crack down on human trafficking. Texas has deployed 1,000 Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) troopers and agents, as well as Texas Rangers, to support Operation Lone Star.

DPS personnel have been apprehending and will continue to apprehend unaccompanied minors, and when they do, they will be seeking information about human trafficking and other crimes. In addition, I am asking that your administration allow DPS personnel access to federally run facilities that are housing unaccompanied minors so these agents can conduct interviews.

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The thought of any child suffering at the hands of human traffickers is unacceptable and irreconcilable with our values as Americans. I implore you and your administration to take swift action to crack down on this heinous crime and to protect more children from trafficking and abuse.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Abbott
Governor

GA:cwk