



GOVERNOR GREG ABBOTT

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris
Vice President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Madam Vice President:

I write to you about the surge in illegal crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border, which continues to fuel a humanitarian crisis, particularly for unaccompanied minors. Now that President Biden has named you Border Czar in charge of the administration's response, I want to express to you the threats and challenges caused by this administration's open border policies. These policies embolden and enrich cartels, smugglers, and human traffickers who continue to ramp up their criminal operations. In many cases, these criminals lure unaccompanied minors into inhumane conditions and expose them to abuse and terror.

In just the first two months of this year, at least 11,000 unaccompanied minors were apprehended crossing the border into Texas. It is my understanding that this number has now likely more than doubled with the surge in apprehensions throughout the month of March. And, according to the administration, there are currently more than 18,000 immigrant children in the federal government's custody. This has resulted in overcrowding and inhumane conditions in the federally run unaccompanied minor facilities. Unfortunately, these numbers are only those known to law enforcement; an unknown number of unaccompanied children successfully cross the border without being apprehended by law enforcement.

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 use every available resource to stop this abuse of basic human rights.

However, it remains unclear the extent to which the 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.

For weeks, the State of Texas has repeatedly sought answers from the Biden administration on several key questions that will help combat this crisis, yet these questions remain unanswered. Americans need answers, so I again ask:

- Who is assisting these children as they travel through Mexico and cross the U.S. border?
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Mayorkas has acknowledged that many of these children have been abused or harmed during their journeys. What is the administration doing to eliminate that harm?
- 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?
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has vaguely suggested that these children are screened by appropriately trained personnel to identify potential victims of abuse, assault, and trafficking, but has provided no further information. What screening is being done? 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 the administration identified?
- Is the federal government using DNA tests to confirm familial relations? How else is the administration ensuring that these children are being released to safe, trustworthy adults?
- What specific measures can the administration 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 the administration is doing to get answers to these questions and to go after human traffickers.

As Secretary Mayorkas said in a recent interview: “these children travel a dangerous journey; so many don’t make it safely.” That is why I urge you and the 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. I ask that you share this information with the State of Texas so we can work collaboratively to go after the cartels, human traffickers, and other criminals.

To be clear, this is the federal government’s responsibility. However, in the absence of federal action, the State of Texas 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 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.

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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 the administration allow DPS personnel access to federally run facilities that are housing unaccompanied minors so these agents can conduct interviews.

The thought of any child suffering at the hands of human traffickers is unacceptable. Given your new role as the administration's Border Czar, I urge you to visit the border to see the crisis for yourself, and I implore the Biden administration to take swift action to secure the border, crack down on human trafficking, and prevent more children from being trafficked and abused.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Abbott
Governor

GA:cw