

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 11, 2026

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

Secretary Kennedy,

We are alarmed by the recent news that the Trump administration intends to¹ award \$150 million to a Houston law firm with close ties to President Trump and no apparent expertise in immigration law, to provide legal representation to unaccompanied children.² Given the political connections between the firm's senior leadership and the Trump administration, we have concerns about why you sidestepped the competitive bidding process to select this firm to provide legal services for children who are in the Office of Refugee Resettlement's care and custody, and demand transparency into whether all federal procurement processes were followed. Children deserve competent representation by attorneys who practice at the intersection of child welfare and federal immigration law, but Americans also deserve to know why their federal dollars are being doled out to Trump's friends and allies.³

Most Americans agree children should not be forced to navigate the complex immigration process without adequate counsel, and Congress has enacted several provisions and funded counsel for these children for many years.⁴ The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) directs the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), to "ensure, to the greatest extent practicable . . . that all unaccompanied alien children . . . have counsel to represent them in legal proceedings or matters and protect them from mistreatment, exploitation, and trafficking."⁵ Recently, ORR moved to withhold funding from over 100 legal services providers that had provided counsel to children for decades, which essentially cut off all funding for representation of approximately 26,000 unaccompanied children currently navigating the immigration court process.⁶ Yet, seemingly overnight, ORR bypassed the competitive bidding process entirely, awarding the Burke Law Group ("the

¹ Debany, Richard B. Declaration of Richard B. Debany. *Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto v. United States Department of Health and Human Services*, No. 4:25-cv-02847-AMO, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, 6 Aug. 2026. *CourtListener*, storage.courtlistener.com/recap/gov.uscourts.cand.447078/gov.uscourts.cand.447078.171.0_1.pdf.

² Santana, Rebecca, et al. "A \$150M contract for migrant kids' lawyers goes to a Trump-linked Texas firm, raising concerns" *AP News*, Associated Press, 5 Aug. 2026, apnews.com/article/migrant-children-deport-unaccompanied-8c8c5b7929f25c410e83d8b1112c5f09.

³ Eisner, Chiara. "More Than 25,000 Children Lose Previous Legal Protections, as Federal Contract Ends." *NPR*, 1 Aug. 2026, www.npr.org/2026/08/01/nx-s1-5913679/immigrant-children-lawyers-trump-administration.

⁴ Acacia Center for Justice. "New Poll: 61% of Americans Support Legal Protections for Unaccompanied Children." *Acacia Center for Justice*, 28 Mar. 2025, acaciajustice.org/a-representative-national-survey-showing-that-american-adults-are-strongly-in-favor-of-legal-protections-for-unaccompanied-children.

⁵ 8 U.S.C. § 1232(c)(5).

⁶ Eisner, Chiara. "More Than 25,000 Children Lose Previous Legal Protections, as Federal Contract Ends." *NPR*, 1 Aug. 2026, www.npr.org/2026/08/01/nx-s1-5913679/immigrant-children-lawyers-trump-administration.

firm”) a one-year single-source cooperative agreement.⁷ We are awaiting final details, but the new agreement appears to cover around 1,800 children currently in ORR custody.⁸

The firm appears to have little relevant experience with the legal and practical challenges that children face, raising serious concerns about the firm’s ability to provide not just representation but adequate, zealous representation. Within hours of the notice in the Federal Register, the firm appears to have updated their website to include content about immigrant youth that didn’t exist on the website the previous day.⁹ At best, this is concerning, and at worst, it is a part of a coordinated scheme to paper over the firm’s lack of experience. Furthermore, the firm’s senior leadership has political ties to the Trump administration. One of the founders of the firm was a Trump appointee – to an agency with no involvement in either child welfare or immigration law – and still another founding partner now serves as Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator in the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA) for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and has a questionable connection to harms perpetuated against detainees at immigration detention centers.¹⁰

Consistent with the TVPRA, Congress has funded, and ORR administered, robust legal services to unaccompanied children under past Republican and Democratic administrations alike. Counsel for children should have at a bare minimum, experience and knowledge of the complex laws, policies, and dynamics of the intersection of immigration and child welfare law. Beyond the professional duty of legal competence,¹¹ there is long-standing concern about adequate representation by qualified counsel for this vulnerable population, which is why Congress authorized and funded the program originally. HHS has yet to clarify how a 26-person Houston-based law firm will be able to adequately satisfy the TVPRA’s mandate to provide representation for unaccompanied children in ORR’s care and custody.

For these reasons and our deep concern regarding the treatment and protection of unaccompanied children, we call for an independent, timely, transparent, and public investigation at both the state¹² and federal level into this award, with the full cooperation of ORR and HHS.

We request the following information and responses to questions by August 25, 2026.

Please provide:

1. Names of all legal services providers considered for this cooperative agreement. Please include the type of provider (e.g., law firm, nonprofit) and their qualifications.

⁷ United States, Office of Refugee Resettlement. “Announcement of the Intent To Award a Single-Source Cooperative Agreement to Burke Law Group, PLLC in Houston, Texas.” *Federal Register*, vol. 91, 6 Aug. 2026, p. 50848, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2026/08/06/2026-16081/announcement-of-the-intent-to-award-a-single-source-cooperative-agreement-to-burke-law-group-llc-in>.

⁸ Martínez-Beltrán, Sergio. “Small Texas Law Firm Set to Receive \$150M to Represent Unaccompanied Migrant Children.” *NPR*, 5 Aug. 2026, www.npr.org/2026/08/05/nx-s1-5922451/150-million-contract-to-represent-migrant-children-awarded-to-trump-texas-law-firm.

⁹ “Immigration & Asylum.” *Burke Law Group, PLLC*, burkegroup.law/immigration-asylum/. Accessed 3 Aug. 2026.

¹⁰ Lerner, Sharon, and Lisa Song. “EPA Drops Legal Case Against the GEO Group, a Major Trump Donor, Over Its Misuse of Harmful Disinfectant in an ICE Facility.” *ProPublica*, 10 June 2025. <https://www.propublica.org/article/epa-legal-complaint-geo-group-trump>.

¹¹ American Bar Association. “Rule 1.1: Competence.” *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*, American Bar Association, www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/rule_1_1_competence/. Accessed 8 Aug. 2026.

¹² “File a Grievance.” *State Bar of Texas*, www.texasbar.com/Content/NavigationMenu/ForThePublic/ProblemwithanAttorney/GrievanceEthicsInfo1/File_a_Grievance.htm.

2. A copy of the firm's application for the award.
3. A copy of the cooperative agreement and justification for single-source funding.
4. All communications between employees of the firm and agency personnel at ORR and HHS.
5. Copies of the merits determination for this agreement and the compliance justification for why the agreement is in line with the grants policy agreement.

Questions:

6. Nothing in this agreement discusses how children who were already represented will be supported by the firm or how such children will be transferred to attorneys of the firm.
 - a. What is the firm's plan to ensure adequate continuity, experience, and knowledge in taking these cases, including its anticipated case-per-attorney ratio?
 - b. What, if any, subcontractors will the firm employ or plan to employ to handle the workload?
 - c. Describe the firm's coordination, if any, with the supplemental cooperative agreement awardee, the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants.
7. There are currently only two attorneys at the firm listed as having any immigration experience. How is the cooperative agreement expected to ensure proper legal representation of approximately 1,800 children in ORR custody?
8. Will firm attorneys be required to convey a represented child's sensitive personal information, or information of the represented child's family members or prospective sponsors, to ORR or DHS without specific and credible reason to believe such information-sharing is in the best interest of the represented child?
 - d. Please explain what the firm is expected to share with ORR or HHS, including who will have access to such information, the cadence by which that information will be shared, and the purpose of such information-sharing.
 - e. Please also explain how the firm will be in compliance with ABA Model Rule 1.6 and Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct 1.05 and 1.06, involving a client's informed consent.
9. How will this firm be handling 'Know Your Rights' presentations and legal consultations? How will they be providing these services to children not in Texas? Please clarify whether these services will be provided in-person or virtually.

Sincerely,



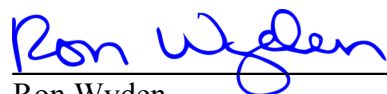
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Finance



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



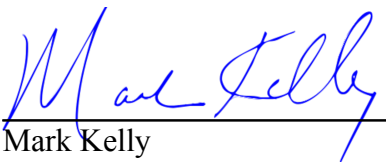
Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



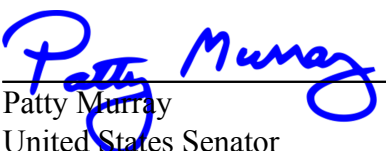
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



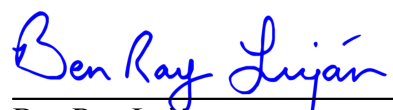
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator