

tion. Within 30 days of enactment, the Committee directs the Department to provide a list of competitive grants and set asides within Refugee Support Services and to include their corresponding funding levels in fiscal years 2016 through 2019 (estimated).

Victims of Trafficking

The Committee recommendation includes \$26,755,000 for Victims of Trafficking programs. These programs support a national network of organizations that provide a variety of services—including case management, counseling, benefit coordination, and housing assistance—for victims of commercial sex and forced labor trafficking.

Within the total, the Committee recommendation includes \$19,000,000 for services for foreign national victims, and \$7,755,000 to improve services available for U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents. The Committee directs HHS to use the increase in funding to help address unmet needs in both programs. The Committee recommendation also includes no less than the fiscal year 2018 level for the national human trafficking resource center.

Unaccompanied Alien Children

The Committee recommendation includes \$1,303,245,000 for the Unaccompanied Alien Children [UAC] program. The UAC program provides temporary shelter and basic services to children who have no lawful immigration status in the United States and who have been apprehended by the Department of Homeland Security [DHS] or other law enforcement agencies without a parent or a guardian. HHS takes custody of the children until they can be placed with a parent or a guardian living in the United States pending resolution of their immigration status, or until their immigration status otherwise changes.

The Department of HHS is responsible for the temporary care of UACs specifically to ensure the welfare of such children, many of whom have experienced significant trauma in their home country and in travelling to the United States. Family unity is a foundation of child welfare principles, and child welfare and medical experts have expressed serious concern that separating children from their parents can cause additional trauma that can have lasting harmful effects.

The administration's policies related to directing that criminal charges pursuant to 8 U.S.C. 1325 be brought against adults apprehended at the border between ports of entry have resulted in the separation of family units and significantly increased the number of children referred to HHS custody. This combined with other administrative changes and an increase in the number of unaccompanied children crossing the border have increased the number of children in HHS' care, putting a significant strain on HHS resources. The Committee is concerned about the lack of transparency and available information from the administration regarding the effect of these and other policy changes on the UAC program and estimated funding needs. The Committee is also concerned about the lack of communication regarding HHS' plan to address the unique challenges of caring for separated children, who can be very young and require reunification after a parent leaves

the criminal justice system. Accordingly, the Committee directs the Department to provide, at a minimum, monthly briefings to the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate on the status of balances and current expenditure rates, current trends in the UAC program, any planned or implemented policy changes that impact the UAC program, and updated cost estimates. Further the Department shall notify the Committees on Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the Senate prior to making any administrative changes to the UAC program including, but not limited to, policies potentially impacting the number of children referred to HHS; shelter operations, including the placement of children with sponsors; and any post-release services.

In addition, the Committee directs HHS to include in its existing weekly updates additional information, including, for both all UACs and the children who were apprehended as part of a family unit, the number of children referred to HHS, the number currently in their care, the age and gender distribution of children, the average length of stay, the number of preteen children in both shelter beds and ORR-run foster care programs, the number of children released to sponsors, and the category of sponsor. The weekly updates should also include historical monthly totals for all information provided, updated as it becomes available. The Committee also expects that separated families will have the opportunity to communicate regularly by telephone with one another and directs HHS to provide any updates in the mechanisms for facilitating contact between children and verified family members with whom they arrived at the border, and the number of children who have been reunited with those family members. Finally, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 and the Flores agreement require that all UACs should be transferred from DHS to HHS within 72 hours and promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child. The Committee directs HHS to notify the Committee immediately should children remain in DHS custody longer than 72 hours before being transferred to HHS.

The Committee directs HHS to provide a report, within 30 days of enactment, on its process for monitoring contractors and addressing allegations of abuse and neglect in UAC shelters. The Committee expects all cost estimates provided by the Department to include the resources needed to thoroughly monitor treatment of children in ORR's care. The Committee also expects ORR to provide sufficient oversight over any temporary and influx care facilities and provide appropriate care for each child in its custody. The Department should ensure that its criteria for placing children in influx facilities, such as the child being at least 13 years of age and having no known behavioral or medical issues, are followed.

The Committee notes that services provided by qualified and independent legal counsel to UACs can increase the efficiency and effectiveness of immigration proceedings and significantly reduce the failure-to-appear rate of children who are released from HHS custody. The Committee recommendation directs ORR to continue the scope and funding of these legal services at no less than fiscal year 2017 levels.