

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 27, 2019

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We write with dismay and alarm over the treatment of children arriving in this country in an effort to escape violence and poverty in their home countries. The recent reports of neglect and mistreatment of children at border facilities are truly horrific, and such treatment fundamentally betrays our country's values. We object with the strongest possible conviction to the U.S. government creating and maintaining unacceptable, inhumane conditions for children and exacerbating trauma children may have already experienced.

Details of the treatment of these children, which have come to light through investigative reporting, should shock the conscience of every American. Lawyers visiting a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facility in Clint, Texas found exhausted children who had gone weeks without bathing or a clean change of clothes.<sup>1</sup> Seven- and eight-year-olds, left in dirty clothes covered in snot and tears, are caring for babies they do not know.<sup>2</sup> Children and their parents have reported having no access to medical treatment.<sup>3</sup> They have also been refused toothbrushes, toothpaste, and soap. Last week, three judges on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals were highly skeptical after the government argued that conditions were "safe and sanitary," despite children not having access to toothbrushes, soap, towels, showers, appropriate care or supervision, or even half a night's sleep.<sup>4</sup>

After lawyers visited a CBP facility in McAllen, Texas, four children under age three, all with teenage mothers or guardians, were hospitalized.<sup>5</sup> They had been found feverish, coughing, and vomiting, and had diarrhea. Some refused to eat or drink, while one was "completely unresponsive" and limp. At the McAllen facility, a premature baby was found wrapped in a soiled diaper and dirty onesie, while his 17-year-old mother was in a wheelchair and unable to lie down due to complications from her emergency C-section and had barely slept.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apnews.com/46da2dbe04f54adbb875cfbc06bbc615>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/21/us/migrant-children-border-soap.html>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/four-severely-ill-migrant-babies-hospitalized-after-lawyers-visited-border-patrol-facility\\_n\\_5d0d3bbce4b07ae90d9cfe4f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/four-severely-ill-migrant-babies-hospitalized-after-lawyers-visited-border-patrol-facility_n_5d0d3bbce4b07ae90d9cfe4f)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/06/21/detained-migrant-children-no-toothbrush-soap-sleep/?utm\\_term=.4b7b519a3f1e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/06/21/detained-migrant-children-no-toothbrush-soap-sleep/?utm_term=.4b7b519a3f1e)

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/four-severely-ill-migrant-babies-hospitalized-after-lawyers-visited-border-patrol-facility\\_n\\_5d0d3bbce4b07ae90d9cfe4f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/four-severely-ill-migrant-babies-hospitalized-after-lawyers-visited-border-patrol-facility_n_5d0d3bbce4b07ae90d9cfe4f)

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/teen-mother-and-her-premature-infant-neglected-in-border-patrol-custody-for-seven-days\\_n\\_5d02ae24e4b0304a120c411b](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/teen-mother-and-her-premature-infant-neglected-in-border-patrol-custody-for-seven-days_n_5d02ae24e4b0304a120c411b)

An attorney who represents detained youth said, “In my 22 years of doing visits with children in detention, I have never heard of this level of inhumanity.”<sup>7</sup> Another immigration and human rights attorney commented, “They were being sadistically ignored.”<sup>8</sup> Instead of offering care directly, CBP agents ask other migrant children to volunteer. A psychoanalyst who has experience with children seeking asylum said, “The care of children by children constitutes a betrayal of adult responsibility, governmental responsibility.”<sup>9</sup>

Although children by law may be held in CBP custody no longer than 72 hours before being transferred to the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), some children are being held at CBP facilities for nearly a month. Since October, at least five children have died in CBP custody, and two have died in Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody.<sup>10</sup>

This outrageous status quo cannot continue. Regardless of the significant disagreements we may have over immigration policy and our country’s role as a sanctuary for people around the world, we should be able to agree that it is patently unacceptable to subject children to the inhumane conditions they are currently facing at Border Patrol facilities. We therefore request a briefing by no later than July 11, 2019 with the relevant government officials, including experts on children’s health and welfare, regarding efforts to:

1. Ensure children at CBP’s facilities are receiving prompt and appropriate medical attention;
2. Improve sanitary conditions for children at CBP’s facilities;
3. Guarantee sufficient staffing to ensure children of all ages are receiving necessary care; and
4. Meet the statutory requirement of transferring children from CBP custody to ORR custody within 72 hours of arrival at the border.

If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss compliance with this request, please contact Elizabeth Letter with Senator Murray’s HELP Committee Staff at 202-224-0767 or Marisa Morin with Senator Wyden’s Finance Committee Staff at 202-224-5422.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.apnews.com/46da2dbe04f54adbb875cfbc06bbc615>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/teen-mother-and-her-premature-infant-neglected-in-border-patrol-custody-for-seven-days\\_n\\_5d02ae24e4b0304a120c411b](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/teen-mother-and-her-premature-infant-neglected-in-border-patrol-custody-for-seven-days_n_5d02ae24e4b0304a120c411b)

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.apnews.com/46da2dbe04f54adbb875cfbc06bbc615>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/four-severely-ill-migrant-babies-hospitalized-after-lawyers-visited-border-patrol-facility\\_n\\_5d0d3bbce4b07ae90d9cfe4f](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/four-severely-ill-migrant-babies-hospitalized-after-lawyers-visited-border-patrol-facility_n_5d0d3bbce4b07ae90d9cfe4f)