



June 25, 2019

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McCarthy,

Bethany Christian Services (Bethany) is a global child protection organization, with a presence in more than 30 states and a dozen countries. Founded in 1944, our mission is to protect and enhance the lives of children and families around the world. For over 40 years we have served thousands of refugees and unaccompanied children, building strong communities, loving our neighbors, and keeping families together.

As Congress considers FY2019 supplemental funding to respond to the humanitarian crisis at the border, Bethany urges you to invest in programs, services, and infrastructure that support the safety and care of vulnerable children and families. While we acknowledge that the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Humanitarian Assistance and Security at the Southern Border Act (H.R. 3401) has flaws, several aspects of this legislation are critical for the continuation of lifesaving services for unaccompanied children, asylum-seekers, and refugees. As such, we recommend that you swiftly pass H.R. 3401 and work toward improving it through negotiations with the Senate in conference.

Bethany provides child-friendly small-group care and foster care for children who are seeking refuge in the United States without their families. Our services ensure that children are cared for, kept safe, and quickly reunified with their families. We have helped reunify more than 5,000 unaccompanied children with their families over the last five years. Child-friendly family and community-based care settings are more cost-effective than large-scale shelters and influx facilities and provide critical services for children, including education and physical activity - services that are at risk without supplemental funding.

Because the unaccompanied children program at the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is facing a budget shortage, funds are not available for the expansion of child-friendly foster care and small-group care provided by non-profits like Bethany. When state-licensed ORR shelters are at full capacity, children remain in U.S. Customs & Border Protection (USCBP) custody where they are jailed in harsh and inhumane conditions. It is unconscionable that children are being subject to such treatment. We are encouraged that H.R. 3401 allocates new resources that will enable children to escape these jails for state-licensed, child-friendly shelters.

In addition to providing essential funding for the continuation of services for unaccompanied children, we commend H.R. 3401 for directing ORR to prioritize child-friendly community-based residential and small-group care; halting the information sharing Memorandum of Agreement that is unnecessarily delaying children's release and reunification with sponsors; and funding critical family reunification services like home-studies and post-release services.



We believe that the U.S. response to the humanitarian crisis at the border can be funded without compromising the rights of children, families, and others seeking refuge in the United States. Our nation must do a better job of providing for the safety and well-being of those seeking refuge in our country. The lives of children and families depend on us doing better. H.R. 3401 is a critical step in the right direction.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for considering our experience and perspective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Chris Palusky'.

Chris Palusky
President and CEO
Bethany Christian Services

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Dona Abbott'.

Dona Abbott
Vice President of Refugee and Immigrant Services
Bethany Christian Services