

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 27, 2018

Mr. Scott Lloyd
Director, Office of Refugee Resettlement
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Mr. Lloyd,

We are writing on behalf of the hundreds of families forcibly separated at the U.S. border, and are concerned that the reunification process currently underway is deeply flawed. We understand these cases are complex, but it is vital to ensure we do not inflict additional trauma on these children by keeping them apart from their parents or sponsors. Given the recent decision by the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California requiring families to be reunited within 30 days, understanding the process undertaken by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in partnership with other federal agencies is all the more critical.

As part of the reunification process, parents, sponsors, and all other household members must pass fingerprint and background checks. However, the wait time to schedule a fingerprinting appointment takes far too long. Moreover, parents are then told it could take several more weeks, after fingerprinting, for their child to be released. This occurs despite the fact that parents who entered the United States with their child were already fingerprinted at the border crossing.

The separation of children from their parents is unacceptable and occurred irrespective of the reasons the families crossed the border in the first place, without regard to the safety and health of the children, and with a complete lack of foresight and planning. One woman seeking asylum in the United States, fleeing violence in her home country, is now in the United States on a legal basis as she awaits further action on her asylum claim, yet she may be separated from her young son for two more months due to delays in reunification.

In response to a recent request to schedule an appointment from another mother in Massachusetts, authorities indicated the earliest date available for fingerprinting was July 31st. Her daughter is 8 years old and recently suffered a seizure while in the detention center. The idea that reunification is still two months away is not an acceptable outcome for any party involved.

We respectfully ask that your agency provide our offices with information related to the current process for fingerprinting, including but not limited to the average wait time for fingerprint appointments for parents seeking to reunite with their children; the number of staff and

Department resources dedicated to fingerprinting and background checks; the justification for re-fingerprinting parents who already gave prints at the border; and whether or not any fingerprinting done under the banner of reunification has been used by your agency to identify additional adults for deportation.

We remain committed to the safety and well-being of the children in your care. The healthiest situation for any child is to be safe with his/her family. We urge you to redouble your efforts to ensure the reunification process is completed in a timely fashion.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joseph P. Kennedy, III
Member of Congress



Edward J. Markey
U.S. Senator