

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

May 12, 2023

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20001

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
245 Murray Lane, S.W.
Washington D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Becerra and Secretary Mayorkas:

Today, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) confirmed the tragic loss of a migrant child. According to reports from CBS News¹, this child was in the custody of HHS at a facility in Safety Harbor, Florida. Tomorrow, Saturday, May 13, some members will be visiting this facility and we write to request a briefing from HHS officials and facility leadership at that time on the circumstances surrounding the death of this child. If you are unable to directly arrange this briefing tomorrow, please immediately connect us with the proper contact.

The loss of human life caused by the crisis on America's southern border is heartbreaking and totally preventable. On January 20, 2021, the Biden administration inherited a secure border. In the more than 840 days since President Biden took office, he has systematically dismantled the effective policies put in place by the Trump administration, creating the worst national security and humanitarian crisis on our southern border in American history. This tragedy is unfortunately just one of the many disastrous consequences of the president's decision to allow America's border security to erode and savage cartels to assume operational control of the U.S. - Mexican border.

While the loss of any life is unacceptable, the death of a child is especially infuriating and demands immediate answers from both HHS and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Following a previous death of a migrant child in HHS custody in 2019, then presidential candidate Joe Biden said, "It's unacceptable. It's not who we are."² We agree, and are writing on behalf of the American people who deserve answers and to be assured that a tragedy of this nature will not happen again.

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/unaccompanied-migrant-child-died-angel-eduardo-maradiaga-espinoza-us-custody-florida/>


² <https://www.axios.com/2019/05/23/joe-biden-migrant-6-children-deaths-immigration>

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As members of Florida's congressional delegation, we ask for your immediate response to the following questions:

1. What are the circumstances surrounding this child's death?
2. When did this child enter the United States?
3. When was this child in DHS' custody?
4. When was this child transferred to HHS' custody?
5. How long has this child been in HHS' custody?
6. When was this child transferred to Florida?
7. Was the child in a group facility run by a non-governmental organization or housed with a family?
8. What protocols are in place to prevent the death of an unaccompanied child being held by a third party organization?
9. Is HHS planning on removing the organization which housed this child from the refugee resettlement program?
10. Does HHS have a duty to publicly report when a child dies in their custody?

Sincerely,



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Representative Anna Paulina-Luna
Member of Congress



Representative Gus Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Representative Laurel Lee
Member of Congress