

UAC Roundtable Participant Statement

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Senator Grassley, Senator Cassidy, Senator Johnson, and distinguished members of this roundtable discussion, thank you for prioritizing this critical issue.

Senator Grassley, I especially want to thank you for the legislation you have championed to enhance protections for trafficking victims. Your insistence on calling for HHS to reform the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is especially admirable. I also want to thank you for your ongoing investigation of potential trafficking and exploitation of children in the ORR program responsible for placing unaccompanied children with sponsors in the United States.

In an effort to further understand the inner workings of trafficking, including child trafficking, I have interviewed former sex traffickers who are currently incarcerated or were incarcerated in the U.S. and abroad. Sadly, in my research I have found that a market for juvenile organ harvesting exists. Unaccompanied minors are especially vulnerable while enroute to the border. In a specific case I researched, a trafficker harvested a 12 year old's eye for \$15,000 in Mexico.

Cartels bring trafficking victims to the border and rely on a network of gangs to facilitate trafficking within the U.S. Through research, I've uncovered the inner workings of stash houses along both sides of the Southwest Border that are used by gangs and cartels to house and exploit trafficking victims.

Stash houses operate in a series of three: the first acts as a processing center, the second is where exploitation occurs, and the third house is used to make arrangements to their final destination. Cartels utilize Cloud technology to track finances and demographic information of child trafficking victims. There is a digital trail that is completely overlooked.

Cartels target migrant children for the purpose of exploiting them in the U.S. through the Unaccompanied Children (UC) program.

Children in migrant groups are sold to traffickers when it is discovered that their families don't have the extra money to cover unexpected expenses by the coyotes who are embedded within migrant smuggling groups.

While conducting research in a migrant shelter at the border, I learned of a mother who refused to let her child out of her arms. The mother explained to staff that she was robbed of her belongings and of the two other children that she began the voyage with in Mexico because she had no money for bribes. This too reflects the market for migrant children.

Post-placement protections for migrant children are also inadequate. In one instance, law enforcement checked on the wellbeing of 25 UCs and could only locate 2. Some sponsors reported the children never arrived.

Through my research, I've discovered that ORR uses NGO contractors to manage influx facilities. There is a need for more ORR accountability within these facilities to ensure the safety of the migrant children. NGOs use staffing agencies to provide personnel. There has been a history of inadequately vetted staff having access to children without background checks or security clearances.

While ORR has an onsite monitor, they receive "filtered information" from the NGO managing the influx facility. This filtered information involves what is occurring at the facility and can prevent ORR from having visibility on incidents and whether ORR policies are being followed.

The crisis involving exploitation through the UC program continues and there is an urgent need for reform in managing the UC program to mitigate further exploitation and trafficking risks.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share my research and I welcome your questions.