

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 20, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio:

We write to convey serious concerns over reports that the State Department has terminated a contract with a university-based research team that is working to find Ukrainian children abducted by the Russian government.¹

The Humanitarian Research Lab at the Yale School of Public Health stated that it was recently notified that government funding for the Lab's work on the war in Ukraine has been "discontinued." That work reportedly includes the Conflict Observatory program's open source research tracing Russia's forcible deportation of Ukrainian children.

Such cases of Russian child abduction now number more than 19,500, according to the Ukrainian initiative Bring Kids Back UA, and the total may be higher.² In December 2024, the Yale research team published the most comprehensive public report to date on the subject. The report concluded that the Russian government "has engaged in the systematic, intentional, and widespread coerced adoption and fostering of children from Ukraine." It detailed an operation initiated by President Putin and subordinate officials to "Russify" those children, and documented 314 individual cases.³ The Lab has transferred dossiers on each of these cases to Ukrainian authorities, but reportedly has been unable to transfer the evidence to European Union law enforcement officials due to the cancellation of its funding.

¹ John Hudson, "Trump Terminates Program Tracking Mass Abductions of Ukrainian Children," The Washington Post (March 18, 2025), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/03/18/trump-ukraine-children-russia-war-crimes/>; Edward Wong and Robert Jimison, "Trump Administration Ends Tracking of Kidnapped Ukrainian Children in Russia," The New York Times (March 19, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/18/us/politics/trump-ukraine-abducted-children.html>.

² See Bring Kids Back UA (reporting 19,546 cases as of March 19, 2025), <https://www.bringkidsback.org.ua/>.

³ See "Russia's Systematic Program of Coerced Adoption and Fostering of Ukraine's Children: A Conflict Observatory Report," Humanitarian Research Lab, Yale School of Public Health (December 3, 2024), <https://files-profile.medicine.yale.edu/documents/a7cf7b6a-3418-4e74-a716-3f049323d728>.

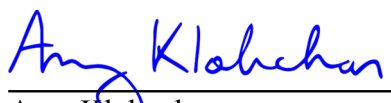
The State Department has had an important role in holding Russian officials accountable and supporting Ukrainian efforts to recover abducted children. In August 2024, for example, the Department imposed sanctions on two entities and 11 individuals involved in deporting Ukrainian children “to camps promoting indoctrination in Russia and Russia-occupied Crimea.”⁴ The Department has also supported U.S. participation in the U.S.-EU-UK Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for Ukraine (ACA), which helps to advance the Ukrainian government’s investigations and prosecutions.⁵ Ukraine has opened more than 140,000 war crimes cases in total since Russia’s February 2022 invasion, but there are reports that U.S. programs supporting Ukraine’s Prosecutor General’s Office have been suspended.⁶

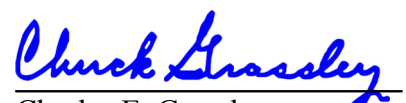
We request that you provide immediate clarification regarding the status and future of the State Department’s partnership with Yale’s Humanitarian Research Lab, including with respect to maintenance of the Lab’s data. If, in fact, State Department funding for this program has been terminated, we request that you provide information regarding the decision-making procedure and justification, and immediately resume U.S. support for this critical work. In addition, we ask that you identify officials who can provide Congress with a briefing on U.S. support for Ukrainian war crimes investigations more generally, including U.S. participation in the ACA and assistance to Ukrainian prosecutors.

We underscore that it must remain the policy of the United States to pursue accountability for the Russian Federation’s atrocities in Ukraine.

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and we look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,


Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator


Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator

⁴ See Beth Van Schaack, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Criminal Justice, “New Sanctions Reinforce U.S. Efforts to Ensure Justice for Ukraine’s Children,” U.S. Department of State (August 27, 2024), <https://2021-2025.state.gov/new-sanctions-reinforce-u-s-efforts-to-ensure-justice-for-ukraines-children/>.

⁵ See Atrocity Crimes Advisory Group for Ukraine, <https://www.aca-ukraine.org/>.

⁶ Anthony Deutsch and Dan Peleschuk, “U.S. Funding Freeze Threatens Ukraine Investigations of Alleged Russian War Crimes,” Reuters (February 10, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/us-funding-freeze-threatens-investigations-alleged-russian-war-crimes-ukraine-2025-02-10/>.



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