United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 28, 2019

The Honorable Daniel R. Levinson
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Office of the Inspector General
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Levinson,

We respectfully request that you open an investigation into the alleged widespread and long-term pattern of sexual abuse against unaccompanied children in HHS facilities and reports that these cases of sexual assault are not being appropriately investigated. Immigrant families and children kept in federal custody deserve to be treated with basic human dignity and respect, and should never be subjected to these forms of abuse.

On July 30, 2018, we wrote to you requesting the Inspector General to scrutinize the long-term pattern of abuse at HHS facilities. In response, we were told that the Inspector General was reviewing health and safety issues at these facilities. However, we have not received the findings of the investigation. Today, we renew our July 30 request for an investigation into the widespread allegations of physical and sexual abuse against children at HHS facilities, and we expect your help in completing this investigation and publishing a report.

It is appalling and unacceptable that from October 2014 to July 2018, HHS received 4,556 complaints of sexual assault and the Department of Justice received 1,303 complaints. Even more disturbing – these numbers include 178 allegations of sexual abuse by adult staff. The severity of this situation is compounded by how many children are now held in large facilities. According to The Associated Press, over 5,000 children are in shelters that hold more than 1,000 each. We are deeply concerned that children in these large shelters and unlicensed facilities, such as the one in Homestead, Florida, are not adequately shielded from sexual violence.

Recent public reports allege that many cases of sexual assault in child care centers are not fully investigated by HHS. We find it intolerable and inexcusable that child care operators are not immediately investigating reports, contacting and

fully assisting law enforcement, preserving evidence, and demanding justice for these children.

To that end, we ask that you immediately open an investigation that gathers and considers evidence of sexual assault and violence, including police reports, in all HHS facilities for unaccompanied children. We also ask that you look into the policies, procedures, and actions taken by HHS and operators of child care facilities after an allegation of sexual assault is made to determine if the agency is following appropriate and best practices. Finally, we ask that you look into what factors are contributing to the widespread pattern of abuse against unaccompanied children and what can be done to stop these assaults and bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice.

Thank you for consideration.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Judiciary Committee

Charles E. Grassley
Former Chairman
Senate Judiciary Committee

cc: Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar