



HENRY McMASTER
GOVERNOR

April 9, 2021

The Honorable Michael Leach
Director
Department of Social Services
Post Office Box 1520
Columbia, SC 29202

Dear Director Leach,

I am in receipt of your letter of April 8, 2021 concerning the federal Administration of Children and Families (ACF) inquiry about relocating unaccompanied migrant children arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border to group or foster care facilities in the State of South Carolina.

This is extremely concerning. As you are aware, the department's child welfare resources were stretched thin prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are just now learning of the mental and physical damage done to our State's children by virus-related isolation, disruption, and detachment.

South Carolina's children must always be given first priority for placement into foster care and the State's strained resources must be directed to addressing the needs of its children. Allowing the federal government to place an unlimited number of unaccompanied migrant children into our state's child welfare system for an unspecified length of time is an unacceptable proposition. We've been down this road with the federal government before and the state usually ends up "on the hook."

I ask that the department determine the potential risks posed to our state's child welfare system and provide my office with potential avenues to mitigate them. I believe it is imperative that we act quickly. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Henry McMaster".

Henry McMaster



HENRY McMASTER, GOVERNOR
MICHAEL LEACH, STATE DIRECTOR

April 8, 2021

The Honorable Henry McMaster
State House
1100 Gervais Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor McMaster,

Please allow this letter to provide you an update on the current status of DSS discussions with the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) regarding the subject of *unaccompanied* migrant children arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border. DSS was contacted last Thursday, April 1, by the ACF to determine potential support resources in the State of South Carolina for placement of unaccompanied minors from the border. It was requested that DSS provide copies of group home and foster home policies and regulations and DSS referred ACF to PAFCAF (Palmetto Association for Children and Families) for further discussions around potential private/Non-State placement options (children would not be in the custody/care of the State). DSS is aware that follow-up conversations between PAFCAF and ACF have occurred, as well as conversations with NOSAC (National Organization of State Associations for Children) to provide a list of interested private providers (businesses licensed to provide placement/group home services in South Carolina) who have organizational capacity and available bed space.

At this time, DSS is aware of six private providers who have indicated interest and have capacity for placements. It is our understanding that ACF is offering these provider businesses very favorable terms for placement assistance. ACF informed DSS that the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and ACF would be responsible for coordinating placement support and case management for children who may be placed with providers in SC, so DSS would not be involved unless an incident of abuse or neglect occurs within the facility. The anticipated duration of placement is 35 days, but could be longer if diligent efforts to locate relatives are prolonged or unsuccessful.

Currently, there are no such unaccompanied minors who have been placed under this framework. DSS will continue to keep the Governor's Office updated if any children are placed in SC, including how many are placed and for how long. DSS expressed a number of concerns to ACF about the impact on overall bed capacity, the priority for placement of South Carolina children entering foster care, the length of time unaccompanied minors may reside in a placement the anticipated challenges in locating family, and any unaccompanied minors ultimately entering the SC foster care system.

Please let me know if you have questions about this information or require additional information.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Michael Leach', is written over a horizontal line.

Michael Leach, State Director
South Carolina Department of Social Services