



Committee on
HOMELAND SECURITY
Chairman Michael McCaul

Opening Statement

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Media Contact: April Ward
(202) 226-8417

**Statement of Chairman Michael McCaul (R-Texas)
Committee on Homeland Security**

“Crisis on the Texas Border: Surge of Unaccompanied Minors”

Remarks as Prepared

“Here in Texas we are facing an escalating refugee and national security crisis. Since October, more than 50,000 unaccompanied minors have crossed our Southern border into the United States – nearly two thirds of those crossed here in the Rio Grande Valley. CBP estimates that next year more than 150,000 unaccompanied children may attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

These children are being exploited by the drug cartels who are turning a profit by smuggling these kids to the U.S. at a cost of \$5,000 to \$8,000 per child. Many are under the age of 10, traveling thousands of miles alone through Mexico from Central America on buses or so called “death trains.” These children are often subjected to beatings, starvation, sexual assault and are at risk of being trafficked. As a father of five, I cannot fathom handing my child over to a criminal and setting them out on this long and dangerous passage.

When they arrive in the U.S., they are told to turn themselves into the nearest Border Patrol agent. Border Patrol stations, like the one we saw here in McAllen today, become holding facilities until these minors can be moved to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio or another shelter. Our military bases are turning into refugee camps – I never thought I would see this in America.

It is obvious that Department of Homeland Security is not adequately prepared to deal with this influx of unaccompanied children. This has left State and local officials to fill the void and takes the Border Patrol away from securing the border. This week, the White House started the process to request additional funding and measures to address this crisis, including the additional authority to remove these Central American children. In addition, the White House wants to enhance penalties for smuggling children, similar to legislation I already have introduced. I look forward to reviewing the details of these requests.

To fix this crisis, the Administration must first recognize its failed immigration and border policies are the source of the problem. At the hearing I held in Washington last week, the Committee heard repeatedly that the horrible economic conditions and violence in Central America were the only reason these kids are coming. No one questions the fact that the circumstances in these countries are terrible, but these conditions are not new, and they have not suddenly gotten worse.

What is new is a series of Executive Actions by the Administration to grant immigration benefits to children outside the purview of the law – a relaxed enforcement posture – along with talk of comprehensive immigration reform. Just this week, the President defiantly vowed to take more administrative actions on immigration very soon – such unilateral actions and failed policies are what caused this dire situation here in Texas in the first place.

The message these policies are sending is “if you come, you can stay.” This makes its way back to Central America, and more children are put in the arms of the cartels. In fact, newspapers there seem to be encouraging illegal immigration based on these policies. And recent internal DHS surveys of these children reveal that more than 70% believe they are going to remain here.

In some ways, this is true. While these kids and families are given “notices to appear,” the reality is that it will take years to work through the immigration system.

To break this cycle we need to add in some real deterrence – first, mandatory detention and then we should explore ways to promptly return those who come here illegally. Not doing so puts more young lives at risk of exploitation.

In addition, we should also better engage with the government of Mexico to step up their efforts to secure their southern border. The problem begins with Mexican officials who turn a blind-eye to Central Americans who cross the porous Mexican border. I urge the President of Mexico and his interior minister, to get serious about securing their borders as well.

Securing the border is the obligation of the Federal government. States should not be required to protect what is the Federal government’s responsibility under our Constitution. However, Governor Perry recently announced that he would surge border security operations along the border to make up for the Administration’s failures.

The President needs to immediately send the National Guard to the Southwest border to free up Border Patrol agents so that they can perform their primary mission – securing our border. Drug cartels and other criminals have and will continue to exploit any weakness in our border security efforts.

We must stem the flow and stop children from being subjected to this dangerous, and sometimes fatal, journey. I look forward to hearing from Governor Perry and our other witnesses here today about the situation on the ground and what more DHS and the Administration can and should be doing to address this problem. Details from today’s hearing will be incorporated into the findings of the Speaker’s Working Group established to investigate and make recommendations to address this crisis.

Finally, I want to recognize the tireless efforts of our Border Patrol for their compassion and care they provide to these children. Thank you from myself and all the Members here with us today.”

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