

A Note About the Unaccompanied Minors



In recent months, there has been a significant increase in minors crossing the southern border unaccompanied by a parent or other adult relative. These children are not from Mexico but mostly from Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. The increase has caught several federal and state agencies off guard. This has resulted in a humanitarian crisis and a corresponding effort to protect these children. Some children have been sent here to Nebraska.

The following is offered as an effort to clarify what is going on:

- 1) Central America has the highest murder rate of any region in the world.¹ Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador all are in the top five for murder rates in the whole world.²
- 2) Children in Honduras are subject to intimidation, abuse and even death if they do not join drug cartels often involved with human trafficking and with creating “child soldiers.”
- 3) Because of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, which was passed with bipartisan support and cosponsored by Rep. Jeff Fortenberry of Nebraska, children from countries other than Mexico are not immediately deported. Current law permits children from non-contiguous countries to remain in the country until their request for asylum or immigration relief is considered.
- 4) The minors recently placed in Nebraska number a little over 200. They are already assigned to sponsoring families here. Many of those sponsors may be related to the child. Some may be foster parents.
- 5) All sponsors are investigated by the Department of Health of Human Services and the Office of Refugee Resettlement and so go through a background check and are fingerprinted to ensure they do not have outstanding warrants or a criminal history that may endanger the child. Information about the specific sponsors and children is confidential under federal law.
- 6) Children who are placed with sponsors will then be given an immigration court hearing date to be heard by a judge. Many will attempt to apply for asylum or other lawful status.
- 7) Currently, the U.S. Bishops are asking for support for the \$3.7 billion requested by the current administration in order to help provide for these minors and the many others who must be housed before their immigration hearings.
- 8) The U.S. Bishops have resisted any proposed legislation to eliminate due process for unaccompanied minors. Attempts to expedite their removal may endanger the lives of very vulnerable children. The U.S. Bishops believe that it is important to retain due process.³

Please contact your member of Congress and tell them:

- That these children seeking safety must have access to legal counsel and be afforded due process.
- You oppose any rollbacks to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act. We should not jeopardize the lives of minors by sending them back to potential danger without a real opportunity to be screened for legal relief.

¹ The rate is 31.1 per 100,000 according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2012 study

² The rate is 90.4 per 100,000. The next highest rate is Venezuela at 53.7 according to the same study.

³ <http://www.usccb.org/news/2014/14-118.cfm>