

UAC Reunification Timeline Interactive – Text

Care and Safety of Children in the UAC Program: Key Events and OIG Review

* This timeline displays key events of family separation, our national review of the UAC Program, and impact of our work.

Date	Content
TITLE SLIDE	<p>Protecting children who are in the custody and care of the Department of Health and Human Services is a core element of OIG’s mission.</p> <p>HHS’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) manages the Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) Program. The Program provides temporary housing, food, and other services to minors who have no lawful immigration status in the U.S. and do not have a parent or legal guardian available in the U.S. to provide care and physical custody. A child remains in ORR custody until an appropriate sponsor (usually a parent or close relative) is located in the U.S. to assume care of the child, the child turns 18 years old and ages out of the Program, or the child’s immigration status is resolved.</p> <p>In 2017 and 2018, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) took steps to increase enforcement of immigration laws that resulted in family separation. When families were separated, adults typically were held in Federal detention while their children were placed in HHS custody and provided care through the UAC Program. This represented a significant departure from previous practices: historically, separations were rare and occurred only when the parent posed a danger to the child or was medically unable to care for the child. Increased numbers of separated children posed operational challenges for the UAC Program.</p> <p>In Summer 2018, OIG rapidly deployed multidisciplinary teams to conduct site visits at UAC facilities nationwide to review the care and well-being of all children of the Program, including the subset who were separated due to the Spring 2018 zero-tolerance policy. A series of reports has resulted from these site visits. This timeline displays key events of family separation, our national review of the UAC Program, and impact of our work.</p>
March 2017	DHS Secretary states publicly that DHS might separate families who enter the United States without authorization. Weeks later, he announces DHS will not pursue the policy.
April 2017	Attorney General issues a memorandum prioritizing prosecution of immigration offenses.
July 2017	El Paso sector of Customs and Border Protection of DHS implements policies resulting in increased family separations.
April 2018	Attorney General issues a memorandum instituting a zero-tolerance policy at the DOJ.
May 2018	DHS adopts the zero-tolerance policy. The Attorney General publicly announces the policy’s implementation at DOJ and DHS.
June 2018	A presidential Executive Order directs DHS to detain migrant families together.
June 2018	In the <i>Ms. L v. ICE</i> case, the Court orders the Federal Government to cease most family separations and reunite eligible children in HHS custody as of June 26, 2018.
August to September 2018	OIG begins a national review of HHS-funded facilities that provide care to unaccompanied children and conducts 45 site visits across the country.

November 2018	REPORT: OIG issues an early alert regarding vulnerabilities identified during the visit to an influx care facility in Tornillo, Texas. OIG finds that the facility was not conducting required Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) fingerprint background checks and/or employing a sufficient number of staff clinicians to provide adequate mental health care for the children.
January 2019	IMPACT: In response to the OIG early alert, the Tornillo facility completes background checks on 60 percent of its employees (1,537 of the 2,546 employees). Twenty-six employees are terminated due to the nature and disposition of the FBI background check results.
January 2019	REPORT: OIG publishes the report Separated Children Placed in Office of Refugee Resettlement Care . OIG finds that the total number of children separated from a parent or guardian by immigration authorities is unknown, but certainly more than the 2,737 separated children covered by the <i>Ms. L v. ICE</i> litigation and reported to the Court at the time of our review.
February 2019	IMPACT: Assistant Inspector General (AIG) Ann Maxwell testifies before the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations." Regarding the report Separated Children Placed in Office of Refugee Resettlement Care , AIG Maxwell states, "Pursuant to a June 26, 2018 Federal District Court order, HHS has thus far identified 2,737 children who had been separated from their parents and were in ORR care as of that date. However, prior to that Court order, HHS was not required to identify or track separated children...HHS cannot provide details specifically about children who were separated, transferred to ORR custody, and released prior to the lawsuit; whether these children were reunified with their parents remains an open question."
March 2019	A Federal District Court cites findings of OIG's report Separated Children Placed in Office of Refugee Resettlement Care when expanding the <i>Ms. L v. ICE</i> class definition and ordering HHS to identify children of class members separated between July 1, 2017 and June 25, 2018. The Court states, "That report reveals the [DOJ] and [DHS] began separating migrant families as early as July 1, 2017, well before the zero-tolerance policy was publicly announced in May of 2018, and that pursuant to the policy, potentially 'thousands' more families had been separated."
July 2019	IMPACT: AIG Ann Maxwell testifies before the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform. AIG Maxwell states, "HHS OIG takes very seriously its responsibility to protect the health and welfare of children in HHS' custody. It is a core part of our mission to protect vulnerable children. As such, we have been conducting oversight of the UAC program since responsibility for caring for unaccompanied children was transferred to HHS by the Homeland Security Act of 2002."
September 2019	REPORT: OIG publishes the report Unaccompanied Alien Children Care Provider Facilities Generally Conducted Required Background Checks but Faced Challenges in Hiring, Screening, and Retaining Employees . OIG finds that facilities generally met a range of background checks and qualification requirements but that improvements could be made.
September 2019	REPORT: OIG publishes the report Care Provider Facilities Described Challenges Addressing Mental Health Needs of Children in HHS Custody . OIG finds that facilities struggled to address the mental health needs of children who had experienced intense trauma and had difficulty accessing specialized treatment for children who needed it.

September 2019	IMPACT: AIG Ann Maxwell testifies before the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations. Referring to the report Care Provider Facilities Described Challenges Addressing Mental Health Needs of Children in HHS Custody , AIG Maxwell states, "In 2018, numerous stakeholders raised serious concerns about the health and safety of unaccompanied children, including the provision of appropriate mental health care services, at HHS-funded facilities. Given the urgency of the situation, and OIG's independent oversight role, we launched a series of reviews examining health and safety issues in the UAC Program. This testimony focuses on challenges to providing mental health services."
September 2019	IMPACT: AIG Ann Maxwell testifies before the U.S. House Committee on Energy & Commerce. AIG Maxwell states about the report Care Provider Facilities Described Challenges Addressing Mental Health Needs of Children in HHS Custody , "...we offer a broad survey of the challenges facing the Program as reported by staff in order to provide ORR with information useful for directing attention toward the most significant mental health-related challenges facing facilities."
October 2019	HHS identifies 1,556 additional separated children in the <i>Ms. L v. ICE</i> expanded class. Efforts to identify and contact their parents begin, under the leadership of a Court-appointed Steering Committee.
March 2020	REPORT: OIG publishes the report Communication and Management Challenges Impeded HHS's Response to the Zero-Tolerance Policy . OIG finds that interagency and internal communication failures, poor internal management decisions, and lack of planning left HHS unprepared for large-scale family separation, impeding prompt and appropriate care for separated children.
June 2020	<p>REPORTS: OIG publishes two reports. In The Office Of Refugee Resettlement's Incident Reporting System Is Not Effectively Capturing Data To Assist Its Efforts To Ensure The Safety Of Minors In HHS Custody, OIG finds that ORR needs to improve its incident reporting system and address care provider facilities' challenges to preventing, detecting and reporting incidents.</p> <p>In Unaccompanied Alien Children Program Care Provider Facilities Do Not Include All Required Security Measures In Checklists, OIG finds that ORR does not provide specific guidance on incorporating required physical security measures into facility inspection checklists, nor does it routinely monitor facilities' use of inspection checklists.</p>
	<p>Learn More.</p> <p>For more information on OIG's oversight of the UAC program, visit our Featured Topics page.</p>