The Office of Refugee Resettlement Needs To Improve Its Oversight Related to the Placement and Transfer of Unaccompanied Children

What OIG Found
We found that ORR faced challenges when making initial placements during an influx period. ORR did not consistently make initial placements within 24 hours during influx periods because of capacity issues and lack of intake specialist staff. Additionally, ORR did not adequately document placement decisions or placement designations for children with special concerns or needs. Furthermore, we determined that: (1) for the statistical sample of transfers, some were missing supporting documentation; (2) for the judgmental sample of transfers of children into restrictive placements, some of the required documentation was not completed or missing; (3) ORR did not maintain documentation for the reason(s) each child was denied a transfer; and (4) ORR faced challenges transferring children with both behavioral and mental health needs. These errors occurred because ORR had limited quality control procedures, lacked oversight to ensure documentation was retained by care providers, and did not have a process in place to track denied transfers.

What OIG Recommends and Administration for Children and Families Comments
We recommend that ORR: (1) strengthen oversight of initial placements by addressing challenges with bed space capacity and intake specialist staffing during influx periods to ensure that a placement is made within 24 hours of each referral and Intakes Placement Checklists are completed for children with special needs or concerns, (2) strengthen oversight of transfers between ORR care provider facilities by requiring that all transfer documentation be maintained in the UC Portal and by developing procedures for tracking and reviewing that documentation, (3) review restrictive setting placement denials and take action as needed to ensure an appropriate placement for each child, and (4) assess the need to expand its network capacity to serve the needs of children with mental health and behavioral issues.