

July 24, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama

President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

We write to express our deep concerns about the immigration crisis created by the inability of the federal government to secure the Southwest Border. Like many Iowans, we find the lack of transparency from your Administration with State and local leaders and the public on this important issue troubling.

At a recent National Governors Association meeting, Secretary Sylvia Burwell pledged to notify State leaders before any illegal immigrant children would be placed in our State. However, earlier this week, our office first learned from a news reporter that 122 illegal immigrant children had been placed with sponsors in the State of Iowa during the first six months of the year. The following day, another reporter indicated that 17 additional individuals had been placed in Iowa during the first 18 days of July. On July 22, senior Federal officials communicated that State or local leaders will only be notified about facility placements and will not be notified when individuals are placed with sponsors in their jurisdiction. Federal officials have not been able to communicate how many of the 139 individuals placed in Iowa remain in the State. Further, Federal officials indicated that sponsors are not being asked about their legal status, which further erodes public confidence in your Administration's approach, particularly when there is no accountability to ensure that unaccompanied alien children and sponsors will indeed appear at any scheduled immigration hearings.

We respectfully request that your Administration begin sharing individual-level data on all placements in Iowa with the Iowa Department of Human Services. Additionally, it is important for States to be kept informed of departure information for unaccompanied alien children. This transparency is critically important on a real-time basis so State and local leaders are empowered with the information needed to make sound decisions and ensure the health, safety and well-being of their citizens.

We are deeply empathetic for the unaccompanied alien children who are coming to the United States for a better life. However, the lack of a secure border and sound immigration policy is sending a signal of false hope to the unaccompanied alien children. Should clandestine placements continue, we request written certification from Secretary Burwell that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USHHS) takes full responsibility for ensuring the unaccompanied alien children are educated and in healthy and safe environments complying with the laws of the State of Iowa.

Iowa is a welcoming State with a history of opening its arms to legal immigrants from around the world. Legal immigrants are an important part of our nation's and Iowa's history and will continue to be an important part of our future growth, innovation and culture. However, the policies of your Administration jeopardize the lives of unaccompanied alien children who are currently making a very dangerous journey from Central America.

Further, the clandestine placement of unaccompanied alien children into communities across the country erodes public trust and puts a strain on already scarce State and Federal resources. Respectfully, your Administration's policies and actions created this crisis and are perpetuating the problems for unaccompanied alien children while ignoring the true costs these actions are imposing on local, State and federal taxpayers.

Therefore, it is incumbent upon your Administration and Congress to find a solution to this crisis and not just push the issue upon the States.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Terry E. Branstad

Governor of Iowa

Kim Reynolds

Lt. Governor of Iowa