

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 9, 2019

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Azar:

We write in response to reports last week of the tragic death of a 16-year-old unaccompanied minor while in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). In particular, we want a full understanding of how this happened and what steps are being taken to protect the health and safety of vulnerable migrant children in ORR custody.

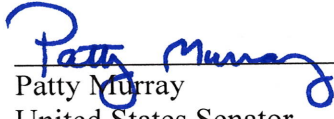
According to news reports, the 16-year-old boy arrived at Casa Padre, an ORR-funded facility that is a former Walmart in Brownsville, Texas, on April 20, after arriving at the Texas border the previous day.¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) clinicians did not note any health concerns, nor did the boy voice any concerns when he arrived at the ORR-funded shelter. However, the following morning, April 21, he became "noticeably ill," including a fever, chills, and a headache, and shelter workers brought him to a hospital. He received treatment and was released back to the shelter later that day, but his health did not improve. As a result, he was taken to another hospital emergency department via ambulance the morning of April 22, and transferred later that day to a children's hospital in Texas, where he was treated for several days in the intensive care unit. He passed away on April 30.

This is the third migrant child who has died while in the custody of the U.S. Government in the last six months. ORR is responsible for protecting children while they remain in U.S. Government custody, and it is beyond unacceptable that children continue to die while under our nation's protection. These tragedies are of serious concern, and raise grave questions about broader approaches to medical treatment for children in U.S. Government custody. To help shed light on this issue, please provide a briefing no later than May 23, 2019.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions, or would like to further discuss compliance with this request, please contact Elizabeth Letter with Senator Murray's HELP Committee staff at 202-224-0767.

¹ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/hamedaleaziz/unaccompanied-immigrant-boy-dies-us-custody>;
<https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/01/politics/unaccompanied-minor-dies-in-custody/index.html>

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

CC: Lamar Alexander
Chairman
U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee