



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 1, 2014

## Border Crisis Strains Local, Federal Budgets

Even affluent Montgomery County, Maryland (median household income \$94,965) may feel the strain of meeting educational and other needs of the illegal immigrant children being sent from the Texas border to communities around the country.

“Enrollment in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) has increased by 860 students in the past three years and will be further challenged by the addition of new international students,” WRC-TV, the NBC affiliate in Washington, D.C., said in reporting on Tuesday’s meeting of the Montgomery County Council in Rockville, Maryland. The county, whose Washington suburbs include the “sanctuary city” of Takoma Park, has enrolled more than 100 of the unaccompanied minors from Central America in its school system since they began arriving in record numbers at the U.S. southern border last fall. Language barriers are only one of the concerns the Montgomery County public schools must address in meeting the educational needs of the recent arrivals.

“All of the unaccompanied minors from Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador enrolling in MCPS [Maryland County Public Schools] do qualify for enrollment in the ESOL program where they receive instruction in English as a new language, as well as parent engagement and counseling supports,” said Karen Woodson, ESOL director for public schools in the county, which is home to about half of all immigrants in Maryland and has the state’s largest Latino community.

“Montgomery County has always been a place that’s welcomed and really addressed some of the challenges associated with minors that might be unaccompanied or trying to reconnect with family members that are here in the area,” County Council President Craig Rice said.

In many communities and states, the challenge may be more overwhelming than welcome. Mayor Jim Darling of McAllen, Texas, a city in the frontline of the immigration wave, said about 1,000 immigrants, both children and adults, have come to his city. Once they cross the Rio Grande, Darling said, they cheerfully turn themselves in.

“They get across and they wave to Border Patrol and say, ‘I’m here,’” Darling said earlier this month at a hearing of the Homeland Security and Public Safety Committee of the Texas House of Representatives. While U.S. law allows the prompt return of most Mexicans apprehended after illegally





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crossing the border, those from Central America must be given a hearing. Many of the immigrants migrate inland and never show up for their hearings.

More than 57,000 unaccompanied children have crossed the U.S. border since last October, and the flood of arrivals has overwhelmed Border Patrol facilities in McAllen and El Paso, said David Lakey, commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services. In McAllen, children have been crowded 45 to a cell with a single toilet, he said. In El Paso, Border Patrol agents have used their own money to buy diapers and milk for children. "None of us want that one-year-old to die in any of our facilities," said Darling, who told the legislative committee that the city of McAllen has so far spent \$1.5 million to deal with the crisis. "What I'm here about is, I want to know how we're going to sustain this."

In Massachusetts, Governor Deval Patrick has said that 1,000 unaccompanied illegal immigrant children will be in the state for only four months, despite reports of a backlog that has the nation's immigration court system with cases scheduled all the way to 2017. That has some city officials worried. Jay Ash, city manager of Chelsea, Massachusetts, told the *Boston Herald* that his school system has already taken in 267 students from Central America in the past year. "This is a stress on the entire system, and it is a stress that we need to have a conversation with our state and federal partners about resolving," he declared.

"We certainly don't want to communicate that our city is not a welcoming place, especially for young children, but we have to be concerned about our finances and our ability to serve all of our citizens," New Bedford, Massachusetts Mayor Jon Mitchell told the *Herald*. "If the point comes where we feel as though our resources are getting too strained, we're going to look to the state and federal government for assistance because that is only fair."

Fair or not, Mitchell is not likely to find much relief from that capital of strained resources, Washington, D.C. With no agreement from Congress on emergency funds to meet the border crisis, federal department budgets are being raided. About \$44 million has been diverted from the National Institutes of Health and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention to pay for food, beds, clothing, and medical care for the unaccompanied minors who have crossed the border, the *LA Times* reported Thursday, and the Obama administration is shifting another \$94 million from other government programs and accounts to care for the children through the summer. And border patrol agencies say their budgets, depleted by the additional burdens brought on the surge of immigrants, will be hitting bottom before Congress returns from its five-week recess that begins today.

Meanwhile, that backlog of cases at the immigration courts could lead to a permanent U.S. residency for many who came here illegally, said Mark Krikorian, executive director for the Center for Immigration Studies.

"Someone whose asylum hearing isn't until 2017 has plenty of time to get a job, graduate from high school and lay roots in the community. That gives lawyers an argument to keep the kids here for good," Krikorian told the *Herald*. "Immigration attorneys are crying crocodile tears when they speak of delays. This delights them."





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