



## Relocation of Illegal Immigrant Minors Stirs Negative Reaction

The increasing number of unaccompanied children illegally crossing the U.S. border into Texas has created a dilemma for federal officials, who have sought to relocate the children to facilities across the country pending processing. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials are transferring these minors to the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement to be housed in shelters, some on military bases and others elsewhere.



However, the transfer of these unaccompanied children to local facilities is sometimes met with strong resistance and protests. A group of protesters staged a demonstration near a Border Patrol processing station in Murrieta, Riverside County, California on July 1. The protests resulted in three buses carrying 140 illegal immigrants to the station being diverted to another Customs and Border Protection facility in San Ysidro, located on the border just north of Tijuana, Mexico.

The immigrants bound for Murrieta were first flown from Texas to San Diego, as is typical for such relocations. Nearly 1,000 unaccompanied minors had been sent from overflowing facilities in southern Texas to a warehouse building in Nogales, Arizona. Other places where the unaccompanied children are housed include Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and Naval Base Ventura County near Oxnard, California.

As the immigration crisis worsened and cast more doubt on the Obama administration's ability to handle the unmanageable tide of illegal border crossers, on July 14 the administration finally took a very small step at doing what it logically should have been doing all along — deporting the illegal immigrants. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement said that about 40 illegal immigrants were placed on a plane in Roswell, New Mexico, and flown to Honduras.

Comparing the relative air distances between Rio Grande International Airport in Harlingen, Texas, to Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and San Diego (where the Murrieta-bound aliens were flown) immediately indicates the illogic of flying these unaccompanied minors to locations within the United States.

From Harlingen to Tegucigalpa is 1,080 miles. Yet, the air distance from Harlingen to San Diego is 1,260 miles. So why is our government flying these illegal immigrants a long distance within the United States, then busing them to facilities where U.S. taxpayers must pay to feed and house them, only to release them into the general population pending a hearing which they might not even attend?

Why not simply fly these illegal immigrants back to their country of origin in Central America (which is closer) and be done with it?

In addition to the great expense of transporting and processing these illegal immigrants, many of whom disappear into the general population, the reaction from potential host locations is often negative.

When the New England office of the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) inquired about leasing



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space to house up to 2,000 immigrant children at the Southbury Training School in Connecticut, the state rejected the request. Patrick O'Brien, assistant director of the state's Bureau of Assets Management, e-mailed the GSA on July 14, telling the feds that the building was not suitable because of deteriorating conditions, complex state regulations for using surplus property, and the fact that some people are still housed at the location. Southbury Training School is a residential and rehabilitative facility for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Other opponents to having the unaccompanied minors housed in their state appear to be trying to straddle the issue for maximum political benefit. Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, speaking to reporters at the summer meeting of the National Governors Association in Nashville on July 13, expressed strong opposition to deporting the children: "We are not a country that should turn children away and send them back to certain death," said O'Malley.

He urged the Obama administration to show compassion toward the children, and described some of the facilities where the young illegal immigrants are being kept as "kennels." "Through all of the great world religions we are told that hospitality to strangers is an essential human dignity," O'Malley said.

Having expressed such sentiments, one would expect O'Malley to be receptive to having some of these unaccompanied minors sent to Maryland. However, one would be wrong.

During a phone discussion with White House domestic policy adviser Cecilia Munoz (who once worked for the pro-amnesty National Council of La Raza) late on the evening of July 18, O'Malley pleaded with Munoz: "Please don't send these kids to western Maryland." Details of the conversation were leaked by a Democratic source to CNN.

O'Malley's remarks were prompted by a proposal under consideration by the Department of Health and Human Services to convert a former Army Reserve Center in Westminster, Maryland, to a facility to be used to house the immigrant children.

CNN reported that O'Malley's press secretary, Nina Smith, admitted that the conversation took place, but emphasized that the governor was not opposed to the idea of temporarily housing some of the children in other parts of the state.

"Governor O'Malley and his administration are working cooperatively with federal officials to find suitable locations in Maryland for unaccompanied minors fleeing violence in Central America," CNN quoted Smith. "As he has said repeatedly, he believes the priority should be placing children with family members and — if that's not possible — locating housing that is safe, humane, and non-restrictive."

CNN reported that the HHS plan provoked a strong reaction from local elected officials in Maryland, including Rep. Andy Harris (R-Md.) whose office cited "potential health risks" to the surrounding community.

Employing the same reasoning we used earlier in this report, Harris said: "Flying them to Maryland only to turn around and fly them back home is nonsensical. Instead, President Obama should immediately return them to their nation of origin."

The air distance from Rio Grande International Airport in Harlingen, Texas, to Dulles airport (the closest major airport to the Maryland facility) is 1,460 miles, as opposed to a little more than 1,000 miles to Central America.

Unless the tide of illegal immigration is stopped, however, immigrants will cross our borders more quickly than we can deport them. The incentives luring illegal immigrants here, from the prospect of



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amnesty to a smorgasbord of generous benefits, must be stopped. Additionally, our borders must be secured.

*Photos of protestors against illegal immigration: AP Images*

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