

EVANGELICAL
IMMIGRATION **table.**

Bethany Christian
Services

Council for Christian
Colleges and Universities

Ethics and Religious
Liberty Commission of
the
Southern Baptist
Convention

Faith and Community
Empowerment

National Association of
Evangelicals

National Latino
Evangelical Coalition

The Wesleyan Church

World Relief

World Vision

March 17, 2021

Dear President Biden,

In recent weeks, the number of unaccompanied children and teenagers arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border has increased dramatically. As has happened under the past two administrations, our country is facing a humanitarian crisis as the number of unaccompanied minors arriving exceeds our government's capacity to provide appropriate care in compliance with the law. As Christians who seek to emulate Jesus' particular concern for vulnerable children, we urge you to lead decisively, ensuring that our government respects both the dignity of these children and its obligation to comply with the law and ensure secure borders.

Under U.S. law, unaccompanied minors apprehended at our border are appropriately treated differently than adults, in recognition of their unique vulnerability to trafficking, abuse and violence. In most cases, the law requires these children to be transferred within 72 hours from the custody of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to the care of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which works with a network of care providers to keep children safe and reunify them with family members or other sponsors until a court can determine if they qualify to stay in the U.S. As the number of unaccompanied children has increased, however, this transfer to the care of HHS is not happening as expeditiously as the law requires, and children are being held in unacceptable conditions.

The challenges of the current situation, while highly visible, are the result of ending the practice of expelling children back into situations of potential danger, a policy that was in place for most of 2020 without significant public awareness. [We called on](#) the previous administration to reverse this policy shortly after it was implemented in April 2020, and we are grateful that you have not re-implemented this policy. Now, however, our government – in partnership with faith-based and non-profit organizations – should increase capacity to provide appropriate care for children as quickly as possible, both for those children's sake and to be able to focus CBP resources on their primary mission of protecting the nation's borders, not caring for children.

We would also urge you to examine whether the continued policy of expelling asylum-seeking *families*, without consideration of their asylum requests, could be leading desperate parents to send their children across the border alone, having heard that unaccompanied children (unlike children accompanied by one

or both parents) will be protected. Churches and other faith-based organizations are already working in close partnership with the U.S. government to provide care for qualifying asylum-seeking families as they are processed into the U.S. and await their court hearings, and this capacity can be increased more expeditiously than the specialized care necessary for children who are apart from their parent(s).

Improved conditions in Central America would also help to minimize the number of children and families who feel sufficiently desperate to make a dangerous journey to the U.S. border to request asylum. The United States should invest in supporting faith-based and other non-governmental organizations in Central America that are effectively tackling the root causes that push people out of their countries of origin, including violence, persecution, governmental corruption and extreme poverty – dynamics that have been exacerbated in recent months by severe hurricanes and economic shutdowns designed to slow the spread of COVID-19, as well as by 2019 cuts to most U.S. foreign assistance to El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras.

We affirm the re-opening of the Central American Minors program, which will allow children with a parent residing lawfully in the U.S. to be reunited to them through an orderly, legal process – traveling via airplane, after processing abroad, rather than requiring a dangerous journey to the border. We urge you to likewise expand other orderly, legal migration processes that would allow those facing unbearable conditions to apply for the opportunity to migrate to the U.S. *without* needing to reach the U.S. border to avail themselves of our asylum laws.

Most urgently, we ask you to immediately sign the revised Presidential Determination for refugee resettlement that your administration has already announced, which will expand opportunities for those with a credible fear of persecution to present their case and be vetted closer to home, and then come to the U.S. through the safe and orderly process of the U.S. refugee resettlement program.

We recognize that, like your predecessors, you are facing a complex challenge with significant ramifications for vulnerable people, and we are committed as always to praying for you and those advising you, asking God to grant you wisdom and guidance.

Sincerely,

Evangelical Immigration Table Leaders:

Scott Arbeiter, President, World Relief

Shirley V. Hoogstra, President, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Hyepin Im, President & CEO, Faith and Community Empowerment

Walter Kim, President, National Association of Evangelicals

Russell Moore, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

Chris Palusky, President & CEO, Bethany Christian Services

Gabriel Salguero, President, National Latino Evangelical Coalition

Edgar Sandoval, Sr., President & CEO, World Vision U.S.

Wayne Schmidt, General Superintendent, The Wesleyan Church