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HHS, DOJ Move to End Sexual Abuse and Harassment of Unaccompanied Alien Children in Shelters Operated by Southwest Key Programs

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced today that it has stopped placement of unaccompanied alien children in shelters operated by Southwest Key Programs, Inc. (Southwest Key) and has moved all children there to other shelters.

“This administration is working fearlessly to end the tragedy of human trafficking and other abuses of unaccompanied alien children who enter the country illegally,” said HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. “For too long, pernicious actors have exploited such children both before and after they enter the United States. Today’s action is a significant step toward ending this appalling abuse of innocents.”

Southwest Key has operated 27 residential shelters that provide temporary living arrangements for unaccompanied alien children in Texas, Arizona, and California, and has been the largest provider for such shelters for unaccompanied alien children in the United States. Southwest Key operates such shelters through grants from the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Unaccompanied alien children are minors who enter the United States without parents or other legal guardians and without lawful immigration status in the United States.

In July 2024, the Department of Justice filed a civil lawsuit against Southwest Key, alleging that it had, through its employees, subjected unaccompanied alien children in its care to unlawful sexual harassment and abuse. Out of continuing concerns relating to these placements, HHS has decided to stop placement of unaccompanied alien children in Southwest Key facilities, and to review its grants with the organization. In view of HHS' action, the Department of Justice has dismissed its lawsuit against Southwest Key.

“Securing our border and protecting children from abuse are among the most critical missions of the Department of Justice and the Trump administration,” said Attorney General Pamela Bondi. “Under the border policies of the previous administration, bad actors were incentivized to exploit children and break our laws: this ends now.”

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