

## United States Senate

COMMITTEES:  
ARMED SERVICES  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND  
TRANSPORTATION  
JUDICIARY  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

March 30, 2021

### **VIA ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION**

The Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Tae D. Johnson  
Acting Director  
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement  
500 12th St., SW  
Washington, D.C. 20536

Dear Secretary Mayorkas and Acting Director Johnson:

I write to seek more information regarding the \$86.9 million contract that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) awarded the Texas-based nonprofit Endeavors to house about 1,200 illegal immigrant family members in hotel rooms over a six-month period.<sup>1</sup>

As the mass influx of illegal immigrants floods our southern border and overwhelms public resources, there are troubling reports the Biden Administration is weighing the elimination of private immigration detention facilities, an action that could have devastating consequences on border security.<sup>2</sup> President Biden's reversal of the Trump Administration's immigration policies has only intensified the Mexico-U.S. border crisis. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) reported 100,441 arrests and detentions in February 2021.<sup>3</sup> March 2021 apprehension numbers are projected to be on pace with last month's record levels.<sup>4</sup>

This April, Endeavors will begin service on its multi-million dollar contract to manage "family reception sites" for illegal immigrants at hotels in Texas and Arizona. In 2018, the nonprofit brought in over \$38 million in contributions and grants.<sup>5</sup> IRS filings show that nearly \$22 million or almost half of those contributions went to salaries. This raises questions if half of the \$86.9 million in ICE contract proceeds will likewise be allocated toward employee and executive compensation instead of migrant services or housing.<sup>6</sup> As the current contract stands, the cost to taxpayers for housing 1,200 migrant families for six months is about \$71,000 per person. For a family of four, that amounts to a shocking \$284,000—enough to buy a small house.

Reports indicate the hotel sites will offer COVID-19 testing, social workers, medical care, food services, and case managers to aid with travel plans. But no further details have been provided. When Endeavors' Chief Executive Officer Jon Allman was asked about specific details in the contract, he did not answer and instead deferred to ICE.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether his nonprofit has ever previously managed a contract of this magnitude, housed a migrant population of this size or served vulnerable children without putting them at further risk.

Unsettling sexual abuse scandals have rocked facilities charged with caring for migrant children. More than 4,500 allegations of sexual abuse and sexual harassment between 2015 and 2018 were reported to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which oversees housing for unaccompanied alien children. 178 of the complaints were against staff at the shelters. Complaints ranged from "inappropriate romantic relationships between children and adults, to touching genitals, to watching children shower."<sup>8</sup> Other frequently cited violations included staff unqualified to manage altercations and deficient medical care.<sup>9</sup>

Another Texas-based nonprofit, Southwest Key Programs, is a prime example of the negligent failures to vet federal contractors responsible for housing unaccompanied minors. An HIV-positive volunteer was charged with sexually assaulting eight minors at a Southwest-run facility and later sentenced to 19 years in prison for his crimes.<sup>10</sup> Hundreds of complaints were issued against the nonprofit throughout 26 shelters across the country.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 20 violations at Southwest Key's Texas shelters included conducting late, incomplete, or insufficient background checks for employees.


DHS and ICE must provide commitments to assure Congress and the American public that Endeavors is up for the task of securely and efficiently housing illegal immigrants without resulting in waste or abuse of taxpayer dollars, or worse, harming vulnerable migrant children. Accordingly, please respond to the following questions no later than April 15, 2021.

1. Please provide an unredacted copy of the \$86.9 million contract awarded to Endeavors.
2. Which hotels will supply rooms for housing illegal immigrants? What rates will they be charging? Will Endeavors or DHS and ICE be responsible for compensating the hotels?
3. Housing unscreened illegal immigrants in non-secure hotel rooms puts neighboring local communities and the larger public at risk. What steps are DHS and ICE taking to ensure Endeavor-run hotels will follow the same safety protocols that government-run and privately-run immigration detention facilities do?
4. Will migrant children ever be placed in a situation where they are unsupervised by a parent or a guardian and left alone with an Endeavors staffer?
5. Has ICE required Endeavors to conduct background checks on workers and volunteers?

6. Describe the process for selecting Endeavors as the servicer of this contract and any contingency plans to renew the contract after the six-month period ends. Include any analysis done regarding Endeavors' prior capability to service illegal immigrant families.
7. Nonprofits managing makeshift illegal immigration centers in hotels should be subject to the same rigorous security standards as private detention facilities. Does ICE have any plans to eventually eliminate private illegal immigration facilities?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

  
Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator

cc: Joseph V. Cuffari  
Inspector General  
Department of Homeland Security

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<sup>1</sup> Stef Kight, Scoop: ICE securing hotel rooms to hold growing number of migrant families, *Axios* (March 20, 2021), available at <https://www.axios.com/ice-hotel-rooms-border-migrant-families-7682092b-952c-428e-ae3b-f8b2d4072c0a.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Laura Barrón-López, Tyler Pager, and Sam Stein, "Biden weighs putting an end to private immigration detention facilities," *Politico* (Jan. 26, 2021) <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/01/26/biden-private-immigration-detention-facilities-undocumented-462884>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection, "CBP Announces February 2021 Operational Update" (March 10, 2021), available at <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-announces-february-2021-operational-update>.

<sup>4</sup> Alicia Caldwell, Michelle Hackman, "Border Crossings by Migrant Children to Rise Sharply, U.S. Estimates Show," *The Wall Street Journal* (March 26, 2021), available at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/border-crossings-by-migrant-children-to-rise-sharply-according-to-internal-u-s-government-estimates-11616800942?page=1>.

<sup>5</sup> Endeavors is incorporated as Family Endeavors. See Family Endeavors IRS Form 990 Filing for 501(c)(3) Organization (period ending 2018), available at [https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display\\_990/237223078/01\\_2020\\_prefixes\\_23-23%2F237223078\\_201812\\_990\\_2020013017087248](https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/display_990/237223078/01_2020_prefixes_23-23%2F237223078_201812_990_2020013017087248).

<sup>6</sup> Anna Giaritelli, "Exclusive—'Reception centers': Biden eyes friendlier name for new migrant facilities," *Washington Examiner* (March 5, 2021), available at <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/exclusive-reception-centers-biden-eyes-friendlier-name-new-migrant-facilities>.

<sup>7</sup> Lucas Manfredi, "Biden administration awards ICE \$86M contract to secure hotel rooms for undocumented families," *Fox 6* (March 22, 2021), available at <https://www.fox6now.com/news/biden-administration-awards-ice-86m-contract-to-secure-hotel-rooms-for-illegal-families>.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Gonzalez, "Sexual Assault Of Detained Migrant Children Reported In The Thousands Since 2015," *NPR* (Feb. 26, 2019), available at <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/26/698397631/sexual-assault-of-detained-migrant-children-reported-in-the-thousands-since-2015>.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Haag, "Thousands of Immigrant Children Said They Were Sexually Abused in U.S. Detention Centers, Report Says," *The New York Times* (Feb. 27, 2019), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/us/immigrant-children-sexual-abuse.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Topher Sanders and Michael Grabell, "Worker Charged With Sexually Molesting Eight Children at Immigrant Shelter," *Pro Publica* (Aug. 2, 2018), available at <https://www.propublica.org/article/worker-charged-with-sexually-molesting-eight-children-at-immigrant-shelter>.

<sup>11</sup> Leif Reigstad, "Records Reveal Southwest Key Cited for Hundreds of Violations in the Last Three Years," *Texas Monthly* (June 28, 2019), available at <https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/records-reveal-southwest-key-cited-hundreds-violations-last-three-years/>.