



Health and Safety for Young Migrants: Recommendations for Supporting Unaccompanied Youth

Thousands of immigrant youth arrive to the US without a parent or legal guardian and are placed in the custody of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) until they can be released to a sponsor. Often ORR detains these youth in restrictive, large-scale, congregate settings that harm their health and well-being. Rooted in the stories, experiences, and recommendations of young people who arrived to the US as unaccompanied youth, this resource draws from public health evidence documenting the health harms of these large-scale, restrictive settings. It puts forward a vision for ending the current system of detaining unaccompanied minors in harmful settings and for shaping healthy, just, and supportive immigration policy for unaccompanied youth.

Following the work of organizations with experience and expertise in working with unaccompanied youth — including the Detention Watch Network and the Immigrant Legal Resource Center — the resource presents a list of systemic and long-term recommendations that promote the health and well-being of impacted youth:

1. End the practice of holding youth in large-scale influx facilities and emergency intake sites, including in military bases. to quickly identify and vet family or sponsors to whom youth can be released without the use of emergency intake or influx facilities.
2. Rescind the Title 42 border closure and fully restore access to asylum for all at our borders, including at ports of entry, and ensure unaccompanied youth have immediate and consistent access to legal counsel, trauma-informed child advocates, and interpretation services.
3. When youth arrive without a parent or legal guardian, establish a process with the Department of Health and Human Services at the border
4. If a young person needs temporary government care, prioritize small scale, non-restrictive settings for unaccompanied youth in facilities licensed for childcare that are fully overseen and controlled by trusted community-based nonprofits.
5. Provide ongoing emotional and material support for unaccompanied youth after they are placed with a family/sponsor and are no longer in ORR custody.

The effects of current US policies for unaccompanied youth reverberate throughout a child's life, to their families and communities, and across borders. In the current system, many young people are confined and harmed, rather than supported and welcomed. With the recommendations in this resource, we are working towards the world we all want for our children: one where young people are united with their families, where they have the resources and support they need to thrive, and where they are happy, healthy, safe, and free.