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December 22, 2015

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

A whistleblower recently contacted my office with troubling information regarding the smuggling of unaccompanied alien children (UACs) and adults into the United States. These allegations—along with those of my November 23, 2015, letter addressing the release of unaccompanied minors to criminal sponsors—reveal serious problems with the system.

According to a report provided by the whistleblower, foreign smuggling organizations have paired children, who would otherwise be unaccompanied minors, with single women attempting to enter the United States. The smugglers' purpose is to create a family unit in order to avoid detention and removal when entering the United States illegally.

For example, in July of 2015, a woman gave Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) information regarding her entrance to the United States with her "child." According to the whistleblower, the woman allegedly paid a smuggling organization in Brazil \$13,000 in fees to smuggle her to the United States. She flew from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to Mexico City, Mexico where she was "paired" with a minor child to accompany across the border. The woman stated that the smuggling organization instructed her to claim the child as her own upon arrival to the United States. This woman and the child that she accompanied were subsequently released on an order of recognizance in the United States. One week later, the woman was granted voluntary departure by an Immigration Judge. The whereabouts of the child are unknown.

The situation regarding UACs is very troubling. Not only are minor children being released to criminal sponsors, but alien smuggling organizations are profiting from ineffective

immigration screening procedures. This means that UACs are entering this country with strangers and are being released into the country, untraceable, and alone.

For a better understanding of how the Department is addressing the risks to UACs posed by the practices of these smuggling organizations, please answer the following questions and provide the requested information by January 5, 2015.

1. How many times has ICE encountered this situation described above—the pairing, by a smuggling organization, of a UAC with an unrelated single adult attempting to enter the United States? Please provide documentation of these instances.
2. If ICE has encountered the situation described above, how often were these pairs released on an order of recognizance? How often were they detained? How often were officials able to detect the potential fraud at play? What policies does DHS have in place to detect this potential fraud? Please explain.
3. If ICE has encountered the situation described above, how often are the UACs untraceable after their release? What circumstances lead to the child being untraceable?
4. What information does ICE have regarding the amount of money smuggling organizations are obtaining from these pairings?
5. What benefits or advantages are potentially obtained by adults who are paired with children to appear as family unit?
6. What actions has DHS taken to combat the fraudulent pairings established by these smuggling organizations, including any changes to screening procedures?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Should you have any questions, please contact Katherine Nikas of Chairman Grassley's staff at (202) 224-5225.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman,
Committee on the Judiciary

cc:

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member,
Senate Committee on the Judiciary