

September 22, 2020

The Honorable Chad Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

The Honorable Mark Morgan
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Acting Commissioner Morgan:

As medical and mental health providers for children and families, we write to express concerns regarding U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)'s expiring contract for medical services. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of the Inspector General (OIG) review of *CBP's Use of FY 2019 Humanitarian Funds* and ongoing audit of *CBP's Policies and Procedures for Detained Migrants Experiencing Serious Medical Conditions* found that CBP's current contract for medical services will expire on September 29, 2020. To date, CBP had not issued a solicitation for a new contract. We are concerned that this lack of action to date leaves less than a month for CBP to award a new contract for medical services.

As experts in the medical and mental health care for children and families, we believe that conditions in CBP custody are inconsistent with evidence-based recommendations for appropriate care and treatment of children and pregnant women, and as such, they are not appropriate for children or pregnant women. In past letters to DHS and CBP, we have urged CBP to implement specific meaningful steps, including changes in policy, to ensure that all children in CBP custody receive appropriate medical and mental health screening and necessary follow-up care by trained providers.

A recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) echoes these concerns and found that CBP has not consistently implemented enhanced medical care policies and procedures – including changes based on Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations.ⁱ In fact, the report found that over a 1-week period in February more than one-third of apprehended children under age 18 who were processed at Border Patrol stations without contracted medical providers did not receive a health interview or medical assessment referral at those stations.ⁱⁱ Many of our organizations have sought to provide expert advice to the federal government, including your agency, about how to best care for and treat immigrant families in your custody. That offer still stands.

Our organizations are deeply concerned by a potential lapse in medical services at CBP facilities in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensuring the health and well-being of immigrants protects the health and well-being of us all. This virus does not discriminate and our response should not either. We must ensure that everyone has access to the health care they need. We urge you to quickly take action to ensure enhanced contracted medical services are provided to all families in CBP custody.

Sincerely,

Academic Pediatric Association
American Academy of Pediatrics
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

American College of Physicians
American Medical Association
American Pediatric Society
American Psychiatric Association
Association of Medical School Pediatric Department Chairs
Catholic Health Association of the United States
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners
Pediatric Policy Council
Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine
Society for Pediatric Research

ⁱ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/708112.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Ibid.