

September 23, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
2707 Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

On behalf of our physician and medical student members, the American Medical Association (AMA) urges the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to ensure the health and well-being of all individuals and their families seeking asylum in the United States, including the Haitian refugees currently at the U.S. southern border. Asylum seekers are an extremely vulnerable group who often face circumstances in which their health is at significant risk in their former countries and may have been further compromised during their journey to seek refuge in the U.S. They need essential and humane treatment which includes adequate health care, shelter, potable water, and food.

The AMA is highly concerned that the Haitian refugees who remain clustered under a bridge in Del Rio, Texas have not been provided with the essential care necessary to alleviate this humanitarian crisis. We believe that health care is a basic human right, and that society has an obligation to make access to an adequate level of health care available to all its members, regardless of ability to pay or immigration status. This not only protects this vulnerable group, but it also protects the health and well-being of our society in general. We urge the Administration to immediately investigate and address news reports that indicate that these refugees, including children, are forced to sleep on the ground in highly unsanitary conditions, surrounded by growing piles of garbage and exposed to the elements, as well as reports that these individuals have no access to food or water, causing them to risk bodily harm and wade across a river to Mexico every time they need to seek supplies.

These living conditions highlight the fact that health care access and delivery for the Haitian asylum seekers, to date, has been substandard which aligns with a recent Government Accountability Office report that showed that even with an additional \$87 million allocated for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to provide medical care, DHS has been unable to properly diagnose, treat, and meaningfully engage with public health solutions for asylum seekers.¹ The crowding and sanitation issues arising in the makeshift Haitian encampment, as well as delays in medical care are creating a public health crisis and must be dealt with swiftly to ensure that these individuals do not suffer any long-lasting negative health outcomes. As such, we urge DHS to take all necessary steps to ensure adequate humanitarian standards for health care, water, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, and shelter are met as soon as possible for these Haitian refugees.

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-20-536>.

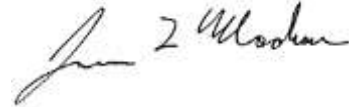
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas

September 23, 2021

Page 2

The AMA believes that physicians have a professional responsibility to advocate for social and political changes that ameliorate suffering and contribute to the well-being of all humans. As such, we appreciate the opportunity to express our concern and urge the Administration to prioritize supporting and protecting the health and well-being of the individuals and families from Haiti that are seeking asylum. Should you have any questions, please contact Margaret Garikes, Vice President, Federal Affairs, at 202-789-7409 or margaret.garikes@ama-assn.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "M".

James L. Madara, MD