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**MAYOR, CITY OF STAFFORD, TEXAS**

**DECEMBER 10, 2014**

**“The Impact on Local Communities of the Release of Unaccompanied  
Alien Minors and the Need for Consultation and Notification.”**

**STATEMENT OF**  
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Before the United States House of Representatives

Judiciary Committee

Subcommittee on Immigration and Border Security

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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. I am most appreciative of the invitation to testify before you and share my perspective on the hearing entitled, "The Impact on Local Communities of the Release of Unaccompanied Alien Minors and the Need for Consultation and Notification."

I am the Mayor of the City of Stafford, Texas, which has common boundaries with the Cities of Houston and Sugar Land, in one of the fastest-growing areas in the Nation and is about 365 miles from the U.S.A./Mexico border. The legislation discussed today, as I understand it, is intended to specifically address the impact on local communities of the recent and most disturbing occurrences involving unaccompanied alien children who are coming from foreign countries, mainly Central America, and literally showing up on cities' doorsteps with nothing more than the clothes they are wearing. Some of the bills before us deal with involving state and local officials in the review of determining the most appropriate location for these necessary facilities. Further, Congressman Pete. Olson's bill provides a 90-day notice period for a public hearing such that the local constituents may offer their opinions in this determination. I strongly endorse the involvement of local and state officials in conference with federal officials, as well as the opinions of the public, to ascertaining the most desirable approach to housing these children while they are in this country. Obviously, a corollary of the determination of the location of this facility and the housing of these children must also address their feeding, clothing, caring, and educating.

Specifically, I would like to focus my testimony on what we in Stafford envision as the significant challenge that confronts us in the event that we get the infamous "3 a.m. phone call" informing us that an 18-wheeler has just dropped off dozens of youngsters in front of a vacant warehouse in Stafford. It is appropriate at this point to emphasize that we would be relying heavily on Child Protective Services (CPS) of Harris and Fort Bend Counties and the Department of Homeland Security U.S. Immigration and

Customs Enforcement (ICE) to assist us with the immediate attention and needs of these children. Fortunately, both of these agencies in our area have demonstrated a highly competent and dedicated interest in dealing with incidents of adversely affected alien children.

I believe it is most important that we examine the practical reality that such an occurrence would impose upon the community and, specifically, our city. In many ways, I believe this would have national pertinence. Most notable in this requirement is to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of these children over whatever timeframe that might be necessary, with the assumption that this will take a closely consolidated effort on the part of federal, state, and local officials.

To date, fortunately, we have not had such an occurrence in our city. However, to provide our perspective, it potentially raises to even a higher level many of the same issues which we were confronted with in the late summer of 2005 when Hurricane Katrina struck the Louisiana coast. Within a matter of a few days, we had hundreds of people from the stricken area in our city looking for whatever assistance, housing, and education we could provide. As that particular situation played itself out, the Stafford Municipal School District (SMSD), which is the only municipal school district in the State of Texas, found itself educating 179 new students mainly from the New Orleans area. In accordance with federal law and trying to address the needs of these children, we immediately assimilated them into our local public education system and took the necessary actions to appropriately educate them in view of their adverse circumstances.

What sticks in my memory nine years later is that most of these children were below the grade level of SMSD students of the same age and needed specialized attention to attain their best performance. Since that was at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year, at least 76 of those students stayed at SMSD for that entire school year and benefitted substantially from that experience. Subsequently, most of those left; however, there were some who remained for the next school year.

I recognize that factors we had in our favor we would not have with these unaccompanied alien children. Those important elements were that most of the children from Louisiana came with at least one of their parents who lived with them in Stafford and that they all spoke English. The situation that this legislation addresses would be one which is far more difficult. First and foremost, it would not be likely that these unaccompanied alien children would have parental support. Additionally, these children would need food, shelter, and medical attention which the city in conjunction with CPS and ICE would have to provide immediately. As for the educational aspects, the situation would be even more demanding than that of the refugees from Hurricane Katrina because one can only assume that the great majority, if not all of these children, would speak no English and yet would immediately have to be considered for assimilation into our 3,500-student school system. While SMSD has a strong bi-lingual component, communications with these children in dialects which they would understand would likely be a most demanding task.

If a facility to house these children was placed in Stafford, providing food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and education for them would be a significant challenge for our city and school district. It is anticipated that, once again, CPS and ICE would be major role players in effectuating these benefits.

Even though Stafford is a small city, we pride ourselves on our humanitarian concerns especially in emergencies. When we were hit by Hurricane Ike in 2008, roughly three years after Katrina, we were one of the few cities in the area to open shelters and provide a Point of Distribution (POD) for people from several counties around Stafford, including thousands from Houston, to get water, food, and ice when they were without electricity for, in some instances, more than ten days. As a point of fact, the POD in Stafford was the last one in the Houston area to remain open and continued to provide emergency relief throughout this difficult period.

We are fortunate in Stafford to have a strong economy and cash resources to address situations such as we did with Hurricanes Katrina and Ike. We can illustrate many other events which were recognized by our congressional delegation for providing assistance to the community under some very adverse circumstances. It must, however, be noted that as a small city we have our limitations. Should a significant group of these unaccompanied alien children arrive in our city needing the city's and school's assistance, this would put substantial burdens on doing all that we envision would be necessary to meet those needs.

To get to the point where local and state officials would have the opportunity to make decisions as envisioned in this legislation and structured into the parent legislation is desirable and applauded. I, however, sincerely request that the Committee consider addressing not only approaches to the location of these children but the many other ramifications and requirements of such a decision.

I strongly commend the Committee for addressing this unique and recent development of these unaccompanied alien children and for seeking to provide an equitable solution to a very daunting problem. I thank the Committee for convening on this subject, again appreciate the opportunity to address you, and look forward to your questions.