

Claim vs. Reality: The Office of Refugee Resettlement Debunks Falsehoods About the UAC Bureau

Under the Trump Administration, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services is committed to providing care and legal services for unaccompanied alien children, many of whom have faced abuse and exploitation at the hands of traffickers and human smugglers.

Claim: Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) always received direct legal representation in court during the Biden administration.

Reality: During the entirety of the Acacia (originally Vera Active) contract from March 30, 2022 – June 30, 2026, the legal group provided direct representation to 8% of UAC in ORR care.

Claim: The Trump Administration abruptly ended the contract with Acacia.

Reality: The Biden Administration started the contract with Acacia, but when the Trump Administration began reviewing the contract last year, it was discovered that anywhere between 40% and 70% (depending on the week) of UAC were arriving in court without legal representation. ORR requested Acacia substantiate their invoice with data so ORR could know what legal representation was being rendered and for which UAC. Acacia failed to provide such documentation.

Claim: The Trump Administration is not providing legal services to UAC.

Reality: U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is appearing at nearly all immigration hearings as a friend of the court, providing consistent support throughout the process. USCRI is also building its capacity to provide direct representation, an additional service that is not legally required. As USCRI continues to ramp up operations, we expect the number of direct representations to increase.

Claim: Migrant children as young as two years old are showing up at immigration courts nationwide, many without attorneys, to make their case to stay in the US and avoid deportation.

Reality: ORR provides funding to USCRI to ensure in-court legal representation to each individual UAC nationwide. USCRI attended 1,852 of 1,975 immigration hearings for unaccompanied alien children between August 5, 2026, and September 14, 2026 while building

its capacity to provide full-scope, individualized legal representation for all unaccompanied alien children in ORR custody who are in removal proceedings.

Claim: Most of the children under immigration review are very young children.

Reality: In general, the overwhelming majority of children in care are older teenagers. As of September 2026, 72% of UAC in ORR care were 15 years old or older. Currently, 1,251 of UAC in ORR care are male and 549 are female.

Claim: Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) protections for trafficking survivors are being undermined.

Reality: TVPRA protections have not changed. As part of their cooperative agreement, ORR's legal service provider, USCRI, provides legal consultations with children to explore, in part, whether the children may be a victim of human trafficking. If a child is identified as a potential human trafficking victim, he/she may be eligible for certain benefits, including, in some cases, immigration legal relief.

Claim: UAC designation is a form of automatic legal status.

Reality: Under the [Immigration and Nationality Act](#), alien children designated as "unaccompanied" do not receive lawful immigration status, a green card, or U.S. citizenship with that designation. By statutory definition, UAC are alien children without lawful immigration statuses. Individuals who illegally enter the U.S. have no legal right to be in this country and are by law removable. Generally, unaccompanied alien children are placed into removal proceedings to determine their eligibility for immigration legal relief and removability.

Claim: TVPRA protections for trafficking survivors are being undermined. Under President Trump, these individuals have been increasingly forced to navigate a complicated and accelerated immigration process with dwindling help after the administration ended a long-standing contract for legal services in the summer of 2026 — and as officials try to wrap their cases at an unprecedented pace.

Reality: Under President Trump, ORR has taken proactive and decisive steps to secure legal services for unaccompanied alien children and strengthen service-provider accountability in delivering general and direct legal services, including representation. These steps include enhanced performance requirements and a deliberate service delivery monitoring framework. These measures are intended to ensure that unaccompanied alien children in removal proceedings are not limited to friend-of-the-court assistance, as many experienced under previous service providers, including Acacia, which did not consistently provide direct representation.

Claim: Protections for unaccompanied minors are being undermined under the Trump Administration. Children are contending with a fast-tracked immigration process, including abruptly rescheduled asylum interviews, sometimes with only 24-hour notice — and increasingly without legal help.

Reality: Under the Trump Administration, legal service providers are being held to strict performance, compliance, oversight, and reporting [standards](#) designed to ensure that UAC receive meaningful and timely legal services and representation. ORR is working with USCRI to strengthen direct representation, protect UACs' legal rights, and expand access to direct legal services nationwide, including assistance and representation for children in their asylum interviews.

USCIS controls the scheduling of asylum interviews. ORR is working with USCRI to preserve continuity of core legal services during asylum interviews and immigration hearings. USCRI does not represent UAC who are represented by another attorney. USCRI coordinates with ORR staff immediately when barriers to representation arise.

Claim: Relatives and guardians of children, meanwhile, are facing additional hurdles to try to have kids released to them, which the administration says is intended for additional vetting.

Reality: ORR policy changes are not “hurdles” — they are common-sense protections for UAC that are on par with the U.S. domestic foster care system, which also requires appropriate vetting of adults that would prospectively take custody of a child. Under current sponsor-vetting policies, ORR has strengthened safeguards to protect UAC and ensure that sponsors are appropriately vetted before release. In stark contrast to the Biden Administration, in the Trump Administration, ORR no longer expedites releases at the risk of compromising a child's safety or well-being.

The strengthened standards include identity verification, background and address checks, fingerprinting, income verification, in-person sponsor interviews, home studies when appropriate, DNA testing to verify familial relationships when warranted, complete release documentation, and regular post-release follow-up. These measures are intended to prevent fraud, reduce the risk of abuse, exploitation, and trafficking, and ensure that children are placed only with suitable sponsors.

These actions reflect the Trump Administration's commitment to protecting unaccompanied alien children in ORR care, maintaining rigorous sponsor-vetting standards, and strengthening the integrity and security of the release process.

Claim: An unprecedented number of UAC do not have legal representation.

Reality: ORR ensures that eligible unaccompanied alien children receive timely legal information, legal consultations, and legal representation in immigration proceedings through USCRI; between August 5, 2026 and September 14, 2026, USCRI represented children at 93% of all immigration hearings nationwide.

Claim: “Before, under our contract, it was mandatory to enter into representation if a child was moving forward to the pleading stage while in detention. You’d never have a child in detention being ordered removed without representation.” —Shaina Aber, Executive Director of the Acacia Center for Justice

Reality: At the conclusion of Acacia’s contract, LSPs reported more than 20,000 active cases, including matters dating from 2020, requiring potential transition to new providers. Although ORR could not verify the scope of Acacia’s direct representation — which reportedly included significant friend of the court and other *pro se* services — ORR is working with USCRI to ensure that all eligible unaccompanied alien children receive individualized legal representation. ORR is doing this while strengthening contract oversight and rapidly expanding legal orientations, consultations, and direct-representation capacity in removal proceedings. ORR conducted a review of all UAC who had direct representation, and while data is not exact, we estimate less than 10% of all UAC who were in ORR care had direct representation provided by Acacia.

The steps ORR has taken to strengthen oversight of legal services provider contracts will ensure accountability for the delivery of contracted legal services including direct and individualized legal representation, which was not always the case under prior service contracts.

Claim: In a September 2026 memo, ORR told shelters that “in the coming weeks,” USCIS would request virtual interviews with kids claiming asylum. The memo states that the attorney of record and/or legal service providers should be notified.

Reality: Correct; ORR informed shelters that USCIS would request virtual interviews with children. In line with our commitment to ensuring that unaccompanied alien children are represented during immigration proceedings, ORR took the necessary step to inform the attorney of record and provide for representation as needed.