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May 19, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

On behalf of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), a non-profit professional organization of 67,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists, and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety, and well-being of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults, we are deeply saddened to learn of the death of an eight-year-old girl in the custody of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) this week. We call for a full, transparent, and public investigation of this child's death and the circumstances surrounding it, as well as the death of a 17-year-old boy who reportedly entered CBP custody with epilepsy.

Of particular concern for us is the type of medical care these children received while in CBP custody. For instance, did the young girl have an in-person medical assessment since she was under 12 years of age? If so, did that assessment identify any past or current medical conditions? What were the credentials of the provider who conducted the medical assessment? Was timely and appropriate medical attention provided for her reported medical emergency? Did CBP confiscate any medications from her or the 17-year-old boy upon apprehension and, if so, were those medications replaced by CBP?

We appreciate the opportunity to visit the CBP facilities in McAllen, TX one year ago and respectfully request a meeting with you or your staff to hear any updates about progress that has been made in response to the observations and recommendations our team made during that visit, such as increasing the number of caregivers at all CBP facilities, hiring licensed child welfare workers, increasing pediatric medical expertise, making facilities and staff training more trauma-informed, among others. Further, given the increase of immigrant families predicted to arrive at the US Southern border, we would also like to learn about the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)'s medical surge plans for children.

We would also reiterate our request from February 2023 that you act quickly to appoint a pediatrician as the Department's Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Director of the Office of Health Security. Children are not just little adults. The children DHS encounters are among the most vulnerable in the U.S. They are likely to be separated from parents and caregivers either because of disasters or migration. They often have medical and mental health needs that require specialized considerations and training. As such, policies and staffing must account for their unique needs. For these reasons, it is essential that the CMO at DHS be a pediatrician.

For years, we have urged DHS to implement specific meaningful steps to ensure that all children in CBP custody receive appropriate medical and mental health screening and necessary follow-up care by trained providers. Implementing trauma-informed approaches in CBP facilities is critical to protecting the health and safety of children. We stand ready to partner with you and to provide our expertise wherever it can be useful.

We are deeply saddened by the news of two child deaths in one week and urge you to take immediate steps to investigate the circumstances surrounding it so that corrective actions can be taken immediately to prevent any further loss of life. I look forward to hearing from you; to schedule a meeting, please contact Tamar Magarik Haro at tharo@aap.org in our Washington, DC office.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sandy L. Chung". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Sandy L. Chung, MD, FAAP
President