

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 23, 2019

The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G St., NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

We write today to express strong concern about conditions for children being detained by Customs and Border Protection (CBP). We are especially concerned about the particularly tragic deaths of Jakelin Caal and Felipe Alonzo-Gomez, children ages seven and eight who died while in CBP custody. There remain significant questions regarding the chronology of events and the care and services that were provided to these children. We believe it is imperative that your office open an investigation not only into the circumstances of these two tragedies, but into the broader conditions of children being detained by CBP. Unless we truly understand what happened in these tragedies, we cannot fix what went wrong and put the correct policies in place so that it never happens again.

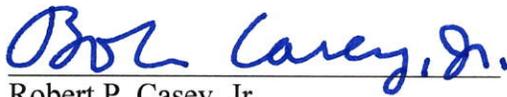
We are pleased to see that the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General has opened an investigation. We also hope that a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing will provide a greater understanding of how to prevent these tragedies going forward. In addition to these oversight mechanisms, we strongly urge you to open an investigation that, at a minimum, examines the following:

- Is there sufficient food, water blankets, cots, and medical attention available at every CBP facility, including ports-of-entry, border stations, and forward operating bases, how is it made available, and how CBP oversees this to make sure that each office is in full compliance at all times? In your evaluation, please include an analysis of whether additional resources are needed to ensure adequate provisions and medical attention are available.
- CBP has indicated that they provide health screenings for all children and migrants. Please describe what that screening entails, including who performs the screening and the medical training of the individuals performing the screening, and how the results of all screenings (even those in which no medical issues are raised) are recorded and preserved.
  - It is our understanding that CBP asks a series of questions during the health screening. Please evaluate how those questions are asked, whether orally or in writing, and if the questions are asked in the primary language of the migrant.

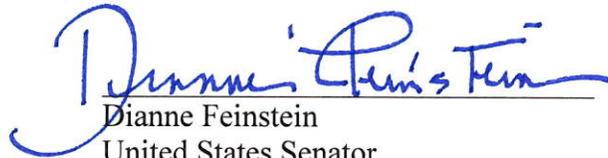
- When a parent is with a child, do those performing the screening speak with both the parent and child?
- Are there any situations where CBP conducts a health screening without directly speaking to or examining a child?
- In addition, please assess whether the current system meets the care standards/clinical guidelines of our Nation's medical and mental health professionals, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- In your evaluation, please indicate whether there are deficiencies in the CBP health screening standard and whether facilities are complying with CBP policies.
- Please review what medical professionals are available for an agent to call if an individual indicates that he or she has a medical issue, and indicate if there are deficiencies?
- Please review how determinations are made about whether to take a person to a hospital or otherwise seek medical care, and indicate if there are deficiencies.
- Please provide information on the medical training CBP staff receive and whether CBP employees are trained to look for signs of medical distress in migrants. What is the percentage of agents who receive this training and what is done to make sure staff are allocated to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of trained agents for every Port or Border Patrol Sector to cover all shifts throughout the week?
- Until this past December, no child had died in Border Patrol custody for more than a decade. Please evaluate how conditions under which children are held have changed in the last two years. Please specify which, if any, other policies may have contributed to causing these tragedies. In addition, please provide information on the number of children who have become sick or injured, were hospitalized, and/or died while in CBP custody over the last fifteen years.
- In the case of Jakelin Caal, CBP failed to report her death to Congress within twenty-four hours. Please evaluate what caused this failure and how compliance with reporting requirements can be improved.
- CBP continually represents that ports-of-entry and border stations are at capacity and not prepared to handle the amount of asylum-seekers, children, and families that come into their custody. Lack of capacity is used to justify a policy of forcing people to wait in line in Mexico. Please evaluate what resources CBP requires to provide sufficient care and custody for all asylum-seekers, children, and families, such that none are left waiting to enter the U.S. In your evaluation, please also assess how CBP can better allocate appropriated resources.

We respectfully request your urgent attention to this matter and ask that we be kept apprised of your investigation as it unfolds.

Sincerely,



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator



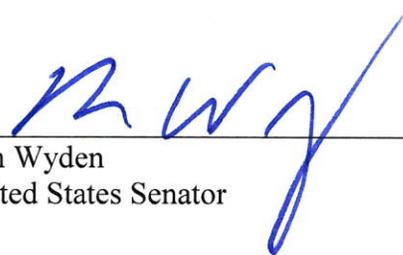
Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar  
United States Senator



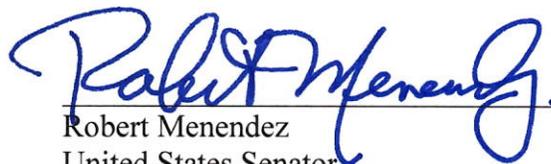
Kamala D. Harris  
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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



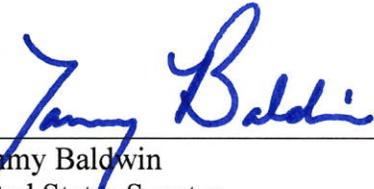
Robert Menendez  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator



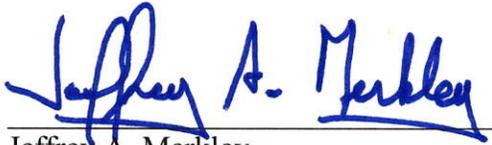
Tom Udall  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



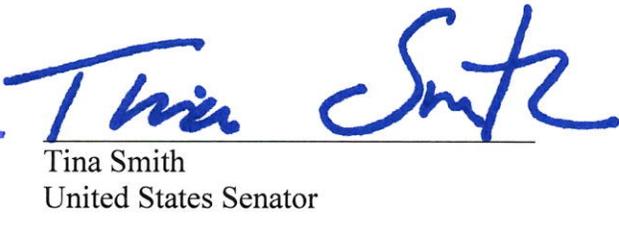
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United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator

Tina Smith  
United States Senator



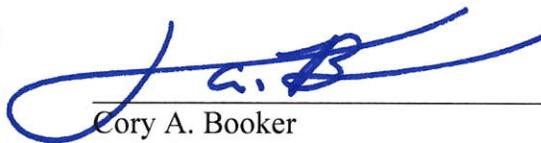
Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



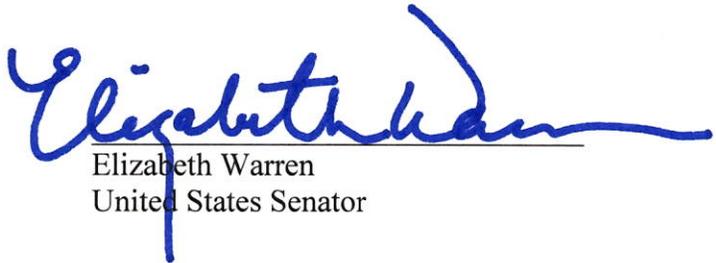
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United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator