

CYNTHIA AXNE
3RD DISTRICT, IOWA

COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
INVESTOR PROTECTION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AND CAPITAL MARKETS
HOUSING, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
AND INSURANCE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
COMMODITY EXCHANGES, ENERGY, AND CREDIT
CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE
330 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5476

DES MOINES OFFICE
400 EAST COURT AVE., SUITE 346
DES MOINES, IA 50309
(515) 400-8180

COUNCIL BLUFFS OFFICE
501 5TH AVE.
COUNCIL BLUFFS, IA 51503
(712) 890-3117

CRESTON OFFICE
208 WEST TAYLOR
CRESTON, IA 50801
(515) 400-8180

May 7, 2021

Tae Johnson
Acting Director
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
500 12th St., NW
Washington, DC 20024

Robinsue Frohboese
Acting Director and Principal Deputy
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave., SW
Washington D.C., 20201

Dear Mr. Johnson and Ms. Frohboese,

I am writing to request additional information about whether migrant children were flown from Long Beach, CA, into the Des Moines International Airport and if any of those children were housed at the Polk County jail. As you are aware, unaccompanied migrant children fall under the jurisdiction of both U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (USICE) and Health and Human Services (HHS). There have been conflicting reports and misinformation which has caused a public outcry. I'm writing to seek clarity about what happened and to receive factual information about any unaccompanied children, including if USICE failed to properly notify local authority and if HHS failed to properly provide care for these children.

On May 1st, reports began to circulate that 100 migrant children had been flown into Des Moines International Airport (DSM) and were being housed at the Polk County jail.

Following those initial reports, We Are Iowa 5 News reported that this claim was untrue after speaking with the Governor, local officials, and DSM personnel. Their reporting indicated that the airport was not given notice of any ICE transfer through a terminal.¹

On May 6th, the Iowa Standard published a post purporting to contain flight records that show Flight W317 was chartered from Long Beach California to DSM on April 22nd, 2021. The record showed that W317 remained at DSM for 90 minutes before departing for Atlanta. A video included in their posted shows 3 charter buses on the tarmac with the airplane. A separate video

¹ <https://www.weareiowa.com/article/news/verify/verify-polk-county-jail-iowa-governor-kim-reynolds-no-evidence-migrant-children-flew-into-des-moines-airport/524-5658ba85-87df-4702-9c15-35032568ec7a>

from Long Beach also posted by the Iowa Standard showed young children boarding the back of an aircraft. Local Long Beach Local News reported that 100 migrant children boarded flight W317. The customer listed on the Flight Support included “World Atlantic Airlines – Government ICE Charter).²

This information, which had not previously been disclosed, is cause of serious concern. Even if no children were removed from flight W317, it appears they at least had a layover at DSM and does not explain the video of multiple buses meeting that flight. On April 8th, it was reported by KIMT News that Governor Kim Reynolds told USICE that Iowa would not accept and house any migrant children.³

Given these conflicting reports, I want to ensure that USICE notified local officials of unaccompanied children arriving into Iowa. I also am requesting details as to the safety and security of these migrant children, including if they have been or currently being housed in the Polk County jail, which is an unfit place for children. I am writing to request the following information:

1. Have migrant children been flown to the DSM airport at any point during 2021, including only for a layover or refueling?
 - a. If so, how many children?
 - b. If so, on what dates?
 - c. If so, where are those children now?
2. Has the Polk County jail or another correctional facility in Iowa ever housed unaccompanied migrant children?
3. Is the Polk County jail currently housing or have they recently housed any migrant, unaccompanied children?
4. Were 100 unaccompanied children on flight W317?
 - a. If so, what was their destination?
 - b. Did that include a layover in Des Moines?
5. Were any unaccompanied children on flight W317 removed from that flight while at the DSM airport?
 - a. If so, how many?
 - b. Where are these children now?
 - c. And if not, why were multiple coach buses seemingly brought to the tarmac on the layover?

² <https://theiowastandard.com/flight-if-it-was-not-hhs-and-it-was-not-ice-who-was-it-armed-federal-agents-on-plane-with-children/>

³ <https://www.kimt.com/content/news/Iowa-Gov-says-no-to-housing-illegal-immigrant-children-574165351.html>

6. Has USICE ever failed to properly notify DSM of flights, including possible transfers of those in USICE detention?

Given the community outcry and multiple conflicting reports, I request that these answers be sent back to me no later than Friday, May 13, 2021. Your reply can be emailed to my office to Denise.Fleming@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Cindy Axne
Member of Congress