

April 20, 2023

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker McCarthy and Leaders Jeffries, Schumer, and McConnell:

On behalf of [UnidosUS](https://www.unidosus.org), I write to urge you to take concrete steps to protect unaccompanied migrant children from labor exploitation and to support these youth and their needs. Recent [revelations](#) in repeated [coverage](#) that migrant youth are working in dangerous environments and that the Administration missed concerning signs of children at risk demand strong action from Congress to end these unconscionable practices, improve their safety and well-being, and demand accountability.

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have challenged the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political, and social progress is a reality for all, including Latinos, and we collaborate across communities to achieve it.

Earlier this year, *The New York Times* published a scathing [investigative report](#) finding a wide range of migrant child labor violations occurring across our country. The report included heart-breaking accounts of migrant children being forced to work in brutal and often dangerous jobs, including for well-known brands and their suppliers. The report also found that while the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) checks on all minors by calling them a month after they begin living with their sponsors, over the last two years, the agency could not reach more than 85,000 children.

The Administration's establishment of an Inter-Agency Taskforce to Combat Child Labor Exploitation is a vital step. It will be critical for these and related efforts to support deeper collaboration with community-based organizations that could assist in oversight and enforcement, be a force multiplier and trusted voice in communities, and create lasting partnerships that form an early warning system for child migrant exploitation.

Congress must also do its part. We commend Congresswomen Hillary Scholten and Nancy Mace for introducing the bi-partisan Justice for Exploited Children Act (H.R. 2388), which would raise penalties for those who violate child labor laws and for the first time impose a minimum penalty. We also support Senator Brian Schatz's Child Labor Prevention Act (S. 637), which includes similar civil penalties and would also establish criminal penalties for repeat or willful violators of child labor laws. Under current law, the maximum fine for a labor violation by a company is \$15,138 per child — often little more than the cost of doing business for big companies. Congress must pass these bills as a forceful deterrent to labor exploitation of children. But more must be done.

Congress should increase funding for the Department of Labor's (DOL's) Wage and Hour Division to \$398.8 million for FY2024—7.9 million over the President's budget request, restoring the number of Full-Time Employees in the division to the 1,000 it maintained for enforcement in 1948. This division is responsible for enforcing federal child labor requirements, recordkeeping, and other key protections afforded by the Fair Labor Standards Act. In addition, we request \$5 million for administration of the DOL task force. Moreover, the Administration also has called on Congress to increase funding for DOL's Office of the Solicitor, which investigates child labor cases, to \$200 million for FY2024—a \$60 million increase, which we support.

Congress should also increase funding for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). HHS reports it is on track to provide up to 60% of children released from its custody with expanded post-release support services, including registering children for school, ensuring they understand the immigration legal process and can attend their court hearings, and connecting them to medical, mental health, and family counseling services for which they are eligible.

Expanding these services will require improved internal coordination so that no eligible child is denied the care they need. In a letter in March to the [House](#) and [Senate](#) Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, we urged Congress to advance \$800 million in funding legislation for the Shelter and Services Program. This funding would assist state and local efforts to support unaccompanied minors and other vulnerable immigrants.

Congress should also make explicit that the program should prioritize funding to community-based organizations known and trusted by migrant communities that provide culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Organizations on the ground are best situated to effectively support asylum seekers, unaccompanied minors, and other vulnerable migrants.

Additionally, Congress should appropriate funding to expand access to immigration legal services with the goal of all children having access to legal representation. Child migrants need ready access to know-your-rights information, legal screenings, and assistance from qualified legal services providers in filing applications through the completion of their immigration proceedings.

Finally, to scale these efforts, structural changes are needed that better support unaccompanied migrant children and families as they become established in their new home. Congress should immediately repeal the five-year bar that denies immigrants access to key services after securing legal status and other barriers that prevent migrant children from accessing public supports and social services.

At a moment like this, Congress must ensure that our government abides by its moral obligations to protect every child from exploitation and to meet their needs for safety and well-being in their new home.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguía". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "M".

Janet Murguía
President and CEO