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U. S. Commission on Civil Rights Announces Letter to the President on 52,000 Unaccompanied Minors Detained in Border and Detention Facilities Nationwide and 2015 Enforcement Report on the State of Civil Rights at Immigration Detention Facilities

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights announced today that it has sent a letter of grave concern to the president, the U. S. Department of Homeland Security including its U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services about reportedly unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, physical and sexual abuse, and lack of medical care in facilities holding tens of thousands of unaccompanied immigrant minors.

A Joint Complaint by the National Immigrant Justice Center and others details examples such as removal of essential medications, being held in unsafe and humiliating facilities, criminal victimization, and denial of safe food and water. If true, such incidents are a violation of federal laws such as the Prison Rape Elimination Act and DHS National Detention Standards that require time limits to detention hold-rooms, separation of males and females, separation of minors from adults, adequate food and water, and provision of basic personal hygiene necessities.

The Commission also announced that the topic of its 2015 Enforcement Report is "The State of Civil Rights at Immigration Detention Facilities." The United States Department of Homeland Security Immigration and Customs Enforcement (DHS ICE), along with state and local police enforcement agencies have placed a heightened focus on removal of unauthorized immigrants nationwide. The Commission will hold a briefing in fiscal year 2015 to examine the denials of equal protection in the administration of justice as to immigrant detainees and unaccompanied minors in detention facilities. Specifically, this briefing will focus on DHS ICE's responsibilities and duties to these immigrants under federal legal standards of care in detention facilities with a special emphasis on the Performance Based National Detention Standards (PBNDS) and the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA).

Chairman Martin R. Castro said, "The civil rights and humanitarian crisis involving unaccompanied minor children arriving at our border seeking refuge from conditions in their home countries merits the attention of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The rights and human dignity of these children, as well as others held in federal immigration detention, are paramount in the Commission's immediate engagement of these issues."

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights matters and issuing a federal civil rights enforcement report. For information about Commission's reports and meetings, visit <http://www.usccr.gov>.

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