

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2509

April 27, 2023

The Honorable Christopher A. Wray
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20535

Dear Director Wray:

According to statistics kept by Customs and Border Protection, some 345,000 children have come across the border unaccompanied since early 2021. We now know tens of thousands of these children have been caught up in massive child smuggling and child labor operations. I am sure you have seen recent reports in the *New York Times* that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has lost touch with as many as 85,000 migrant children.¹ Thousands of these children are now the prey of child labor criminals.

The Biden Administration is morally responsible for their fate. The President lifted Title 42 restrictions on unaccompanied children in early 2021. Reporting reveals that HHS loosened vetting processes for sponsors and retaliated against whistleblowers who raised these concerns.² As a result, thousands of children have been handed over to modern-day slave traders. They are forced into factory work under punishing conditions.³ They are forced to make auto parts, process meat in slaughterhouses, and reroof houses.⁴ They are denied food, education, and sometimes fear for their lives. They suffer sexual violence. In a country that claims to value the rule of law and the protection of children, this is unconscionable.

The pervasive maltreatment of migrant children plainly violates both the Fair Labor Standards Act, which prohibits the abuse of underage workers, and the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, which designates human trafficking offenses as federal crimes. The FBI must mount a full-scale effort to locate these missing children and to bring to justice the criminals who are holding them in modern-day slavery. The FBI must also investigate HHS and the Department of Homeland Security for their role in facilitating the exploitation of these children, in violation of the law.

This issue must be a leading FBI priority. Please provide my office with a full report on the whereabouts of these children, and of any prosecutions initiated, no later than May 25, 2023.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Josh Hawley
United States Senator

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/17/us/politics/migrant-child-labor-biden.html>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>