



Unaccompanied Minors

The Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops supports care for unaccompanied minors and efforts to reunite families separated by migration.

In 2015, 6,025 children entered Texas unaccompanied (Department of Home Land Security <http://www.dhs.gov/index.shtm>). Youth from Burma, Central America, Africa, Mexico and many other countries enter the United States in need of caring homes.

The United States Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program (URM), jointly sponsored by the US Conference of Bishops Migration & Refugee Services and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), operating since the mid-1970s, is the only program of its kind in the world—unique in its fusion of child welfare and refugee protection by incorporating unaccompanied children into the United States' existing child welfare framework through agencies with expertise in serving children and families with forced migration experiences. The URM program embodies the core ideals of U.S. domestic

and foreign policies by offering protection to the most vulnerable and promoting the integration of unaccompanied children into local communities.

Currently, 23 URM programs operate in 15 states, including one operated by Catholic Charities in Richmond Texas. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and LIRS are the two national resettlement agencies that are authorized by the U.S. Department of State to place unaccompanied refugee minors throughout the national URM network.

In his testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, Bishop Seitz recommended that Congress:

- Address the issue of unaccompanied child migration as a humanitarian crisis requiring cooperation from all branches of the US government and appropriate the necessary funding to respond to the crisis in a holistic and child protection-focused manner;
- Adopts policies to ensure that unaccompanied migrant children receive

appropriate child welfare services, legal assistance, and access to immigration protection where appropriate;

- Require that a best interest of the child standard be applied in immigration proceedings governing unaccompanied alien children;
- Examine root causes driving this forced migration situation, such as violence from non-state actors in countries of origin and a lack of citizen security and adequate child protection mechanisms; and
- Seek and support innovative home country and transit country solutions that would enable children to remain and develop safely in their home country.

Texas bishops support these recommendations at the national level and urge state and local authorities, parishes, and individual Catholics to support them as well. For many years US immigration policy has given priority to the reunification of families. The bishops believe this is sound public policy that is particularly important to the welfare of unaccompanied immigrant minors.

Where we stand

The TCCB has reviewed the following legislation for the 85th Texas Legislature:



HB 278 establishes a task force to assess the public and private costs of providing humanitarian relief to refugee children. The TCCB supports this bill to better assess and provide for the needs of children seeking asylum.



HB 393 eliminates the Texas DREAM Act which allows resident tuition for undocumented immigrants who completed high school in Texas. The TCCB opposes this bill which reduces access to affordable tuition for tax paying residents of Texas.

“I note that the protection of migrant children is an especially important issue for the Catholic Church, as one of Jesus’ first experiences as an infant was to flee for his life from King Herod with his family to Egypt. Indeed, Jesus Himself was a child migrant fleeing violence. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were asylum-seekers and faced the same choice as the one facing thousands of children fleeing to the United States each year.”

-- *Bishop Mark Seitz, Bishop of El Paso, in testimony to the US House Judiciary Committee, June 25, 2014*



SB 141 requires eligibility for federal financial aid in order to receive TEXAS grants for state financial aid. The TCCB opposes this bill because it penalizes tax-paying Texas residents.



SB 168 increases the immigration law, use of force, and cultural sensitivity training requirements for all forces assigned to patrol the border. The TCCB supports this bill to improve law enforcement training for those serving the Texas border region.

You can find more information on the Texas Conference of Catholic Bishops’ policy priorities at www.txcatholic.org/public-policy.