

Department of Health and Human Services Lost Track of Another 1,500 Immigrant Children

By [World Socialist Web Site](#)

Global Research, September 21, 2018

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

HHS lost track of another 1,500 immigrant children

For the second time this year, the Department of Health and Human Services has notified Congress that it cannot locate about 1,500 children taken into custody by immigration authorities and transferred to the jurisdiction of HHS to provide the needed care. HHS officials told Senate staffers that case managers could not locate 1,488 children when they called placement centers and foster families between April and June. The figure represents 13 percent of all unaccompanied children processed by the federal government during that period.

In April, HHS revealed that it had lost track of 1,475 children in late 2017, in a scenario reminiscent of the current one. These children too were unaccompanied minors placed with foster families or foster care agencies through the United States.

“The fact that HHS, which placed these unaccompanied minors with sponsors, doesn’t know the whereabouts of nearly 1,500 of them is very troubling,” Republican Senator Rob Portman of Ohio, chairman of the Senate committee overseeing HHS, said, stating the obvious. “Many of these kids are vulnerable to trafficking and abuse, and to not take responsibility for their safety is unacceptable.”

An HHS spokesman claimed that most of the children had been placed with family members, and that these adult sponsors had not responded or could not be reached. Left unstated was that many of the “sponsors” are themselves undocumented immigrants, who could have been seized by Immigration and Customs Enforcement or have moved to avoid ICE persecution. An ICE official told the committee that 80 percent of the sponsors are themselves undocumented.

Portman and Democratic Senator Tom Carper are cosponsoring largely cosmetic legislation that would give HHS authority and legal responsibility for the welfare of these children even after they are released from custody. Currently the HHS can wash its hands of the children once it classifies them as “lost,” which could be nothing more than a disconnected telephone.

Funds diverted from AIDS and cancer research to jail immigrant children

A September 5 letter from HHS Secretary Alex Azar to Democratic Senator Patty Murray, obtained and made public by *The Hill* after its existence was reported by Yahoo News,

reveals that the department is planning to reallocate about \$180 million in health care funds to pay for the detention and processing of immigrant children. All detained immigrant children are transferred by immigration agencies to the jurisdiction of HHS.

Despite having this notification for more than two weeks, Murray's office did not make any public announcement to alert the public and especially those opposed to the Trump administration's persecution of immigrants.

HHS wants to divert \$80 million from other refugee support programs, and research programs at the National Cancer Institution, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Some \$5.7 million would be diverted from the Ryan White HIV-AIDS program, which has already had \$16 million diverted this year. NIH would lose the most, \$87.3 million overall, while \$16.7 million would be cut from CDC, \$16.7 from Head Start, \$9.8 million from Medicare and Medicare operations, \$13.3 million from the National Cancer Institute, and \$2.2 million from maternal and child health programs.

The number of children held by federal officials and transferred to HHS skyrocketed this spring, after the implementation of the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" policy, which effectively means that all undocumented immigrants, including those claiming refugee status, are imprisoned and held in custody until their status is determined.

ICE held nearly 1,500 US citizens as "aliens"

A lengthy feature report in the *Los Angeles Times* Monday night revealed that [Davino Watson](#), the American citizen held illegally in the custody of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement for 1,273 days, was far from the only citizen subjected to such horrific abuse of power. More than 1,480 people detained by ICE since 2012 have been released from custody after their citizenship claims were confirmed, according to agency figures.

The newspaper wrote:

"Victims include a landscaper snatched in a Home Depot parking lot in Rialto and held for days despite his son's attempts to show agents the man's U.S. passport; a New York resident locked up for more than three years fighting deportation efforts after a federal agent mistook his father for someone who wasn't a U.S. citizen; and a Rhode Island housekeeper mistakenly targeted twice, resulting in her spending a night in prison the second time even though her husband had brought her U.S. passport to a court hearing."

The *Times* investigation confirmed that there is no presumption of innocence for those detained by ICE, but rather the opposite, "a presumption that pervades U.S. immigration agencies and courts that those born outside the United States are not here legally unless electronic records show otherwise." Several victims were arrested despite being in possession of their passports, and one was actually arrested on two different occasions, each time on suspicion of being undocumented.

Among the cases detailed was that of Sergio Carrillo, a 39-year-old landscaper born in Mexico, who became a citizen as a teenager in 1994 when his mother became a citizen. He has a certificate of citizenship and a passport, which would have been evident in any ICE search of federal databases. He was arrested in Rialto, California and held for nearly a week.

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