

**Unaccompanied Children Entering the United States
Resolution Proposal to be Submitted by the
Global Perspectives Community to the
American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences**

WHEREAS, All children should be treated with dignity, respect and special concern for their individual needs and human rights.

WHEREAS, An unaccompanied child has no lawful immigration status in the United States, may have no parent or legal guardian in the United States to provide care and physical custody, is under 18 years of age, but is entitled by law to a fair and a thorough review.

WHEREAS, The influx of unaccompanied children entering the United States from a number of foreign countries is due to a myriad of reasons that include escalating violence, abuse, persecution, and insecurity.

WHEREAS, Youth separated from a protective environment are especially vulnerable to becoming victims of human exploitation, trafficking and abuse.

WHEREAS, The policies adopted, amended, or implemented shall include considerations of the best interests of the child.

BE IT RESOLVED THAT

AAFCS members actively support policies that consider and uphold the best interests of the child.

AAFCS members, communities, and affiliates actively collaborate with other organizations to consider the complexity of issues that surround unaccompanied children entering the United States through the promotion of awareness, education, analysis and action.

Rationale

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) reports a dramatic increase in the number of unaccompanied children entering the United States, with an average of 6,775 children between 2003 and 2011; 13,625 children in 2012; 24,668 children in 2013; and more than 60,000 children estimated for 2014. Of those children who entered in 2013, the ORR reports 24% were under the age of 14. The vast majority of these children come from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Since 2006 the number of unaccompanied children from Mexico has remained relatively constant. The recent influx is due to migration from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador - a region known as the "Northern Triangle." According to the U.S. Customs and Border Protection 57,525 unaccompanied children were apprehended between October 1, 2013 and June 30, 2014. The largest number of children (29%) came from Honduras, followed by Guatemala (25%), El Salvador (24%), and Mexico (22%). Researchers consistently cite increased Northern Triangle violence as the primary motivation for migration since 2011 (American Immigration Council, 2014). In a report by the United Nation's High Commission for Refugees, 61% of the child migrants listed crime, gang threats, and insecurity as reasons for leaving. In addition to escaping violence, abuse or persecution, the ORR identified additional reasons these children come to the United States: to find family members already residing in the United States; to seek work to support themselves, their family, or their own children; and/or they were brought into the United States by human trafficking rings. The recent increase of unaccompanied children migrating is not

limited to the United States, as a growing number are seeking refuge in Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Belize.

Upon arrival the children encounter federal authorities, being held in detention centers, limited access to legal counsel, return to their home country or/and resettlement to a location in the United States. The process subjects them to a myriad of federal, state and local policies. Federal policy weighs in on their status and resettlement, state and local policies provide the basis for available services, access to education and health care, and their well-being. Case management, state and local budgets, support from faith-based and community organizations also influence their wellbeing as do community attitudes and whether they are welcomed.

There were 45,029 unaccompanied children who crossed the border into the United States and were released to a sponsor between January 1 and September 30, 2014. The distribution of the children is highly varied among the states with most going to urban counties. The variations among the states included here suggest the children's needs and support are placing high demands on agencies and support services. Some noteworthy states and the number of children placed are as follow: Alaska (3), California (4,905), Florida (4,502), Georgia (1,709), Hawaii (8), Louisiana (1,427), Massachusetts (1,175), New Jersey (2,276), New York (5,033), Tennessee (1,079), Texas (6,272), and Virginia (3,319). (For more information about specific states and counties see ORR website at www.acf.hhs.gov and search UAC infographic.)

References

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Impact Statement

Public policy advocacy for the awareness of and education about the complexity of issues that surround unaccompanied children entering the United States is directly related to the mission of the Association and the profession, and will have little or no impact on the budget or other resources of the organization, because;

- A. Distribution of this resolution and the accompanying educational materials can be accomplished through electronic means.
- B. Passage of the resolution does not require hiring additional AAFCS staff.
- C. Funds to support any new local, state or national program would be sought through external sources.

Suggested Implementation Strategies

1. Develop a concise statement that reinforces the mission of AAFCS and promotes the awareness of the complexity of issues that surround unaccompanied children entering the United States;
2. Develop and distribute educational materials and resources through existing communication pathways:
 - a. Messages to affiliates through FACS, APU Conferences and APU Meetings, and the Student Unit;
 - b. The Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences, Research to Practice;
 - c. AAFCS Annual Meeting, Research-to-Practice Roundtables;
 - d. AAFCS Annual Meeting Community Showcase; and
 - e. Share research, information, and possible actions with other communities, organizations, and associations within and outside of AAFCS.
3. Analyze the issues of the unaccompanied children for the local communities and help develop appropriate strategies and actions for the community. AAFCS Affiliate members collaborate with other organizations to respond to the needs of children in local communities.
4. Collaborate with other organizations to promote, adopt, amend, and/or implement public policies that consider and uphold the best interest of the children.