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Biden administration continues to jail record number of immigrant children

The number of immigrant children detained by the Biden administration continues to grow as two officials from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced on Monday plans to hold thousands of teenage boys at a convention center in downtown Dallas.

A DHS document obtained by NPR revealed that 4,276 unaccompanied migrant children were being held by the government. The average stay in a camp was 117 hours, far longer than the maximum 72 hours allowed under the law.



Migrant children at a detention camp in Homestead, Florida, Feb. 19, 2019 (AP Photo/Wilfredo Lee, File)

Another temporary camp in Midland, Texas, originally for oilfield workers, will be opened to jail migrants. Even a former NASA site, Moffett Federal Airfield in Mountain View, California, is being considered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as another immigrant detention center.

The opening of these new facilities occurs as an influx of refugees and immigrants, many of them unaccompanied children fleeing poverty and violence in Central America, arrive at the US-Mexico border. An estimated 9,400 unaccompanied minors arrived along the border in February, three times the number from last year.

Despite being elected in no small part due to the universal revulsion with the Trump administration's inhumane and xenophobic immigration policies, President Joe Biden is continuing and in fact, expanding the war on immigrants and refugees.

The Biden administration is now pushing all adult immigrants, including those with children, back to Mexico on the grounds that they pose a health risk due to the coronavirus. Using the Title 42 provision, immigrants are being denied the right to asylum and the right to a hearing before their deportation. Some 70 percent of the 100,000 immigrants arrested at the border in February were sent back across the border this way. Thousands, including families and unaccompanied children, now languish in squalid camps in Mexico at risk of COVID-19 and other diseases as well as predatory gangs.

Children who are "lucky" enough to be penned into an American immigrant camp are now telling court-appointed lawyers that they have not been outside for days and are confined in overcrowded tents. One such camp in Donna, Texas, was only meant to temporarily house 250 people, but now has 1,000 children and teenagers, some as young as one year old.

According to lawyers who were allowed to interview just 20 children protected by court settlements, the Border Patrol is holding 40 children to a room in white tents cordoned off by clear, plastic sheets. The 1997 Flores settlement mandates that such inspections be allowed to take place.

The children told lawyers how there were not enough mats to sleep on, forcing some to sleep on the ground or a metal bench. Some were forced to stay in their crowded room for

the entirety of their stay. The lawyers were not allowed by the Justice Department to go directly to the facility but instead were brought to a portable unit with the 20 children inside.

One of the lawyers, Leecia Welch, told the *New York Times*, “One child told me that she hadn’t showered in six days, others said two and others three.” She also had been given a list of more than 1,000 children with a “staggering” number under the age of 10. Most of the children according to her had been held for five to seven days, a violation of the Flores settlement.

Most of the children are being held in COVID-19 quarantine for 10 days in camps around the country, creating overcrowding at facilities like in Donna. In response, the Biden administration opened a new camp in Carrizo Springs, Texas for up to 700 immigrants. Another possible camp is now reportedly being constructed in Homestead, Florida at a site which used to detain over 1,700 immigrant children.

Responding to right-wing criticism that the White House’s “open-border” policies have created the inhumane conditions in the detention camps, President Biden told ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos in an interview Tuesday that his administration would continue all of the previous hated policies of Trump.

Biden told would-be migrants, “Don’t come over. Don’t leave your town or city or community.” He even boasted to Stephanopoulos that “we’re sending back people” who cross the border, adding, “The idea that Joe Biden said, ‘Come’—because I heard the other day that they’re coming because they know I’m a nice guy. Here’s the deal, they’re not.”

Biden’s Homeland Security Secretary, Alejandro Mayorkas, told a House panel on Wednesday that the situation along the border was not as bad as Republican critics hypocritically made it out to be. While things have been “undoubtedly difficult,” the surge along the border was not the fault of the current administration.

Mayorkas dismissed the influx of migrants, the highest seen in the last 20 years, as “episodic.” He also said that migrants were being tested for coronavirus during their detention, increasing their wait time.

The new facilities are being sold by the Biden administration and its political supporters as a temporary means by which to decrease the time spent by immigrant youth in the camps. The fact that these children are being held longer and longer in worsening conditions and families are being sent back to Mexico in record numbers to face their possible deaths is, of course, never mentioned.

All those who promoted the idea that a Biden White House would welcome immigrants and refugees with open arms and wind back the hated policies of Trump now bear political and moral responsibility for the death and suffering along the US-Mexico border.

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