

Listening Session Questions for Stakeholders: Unaccompanied Children, their Families and/or Sponsors

Thank you all very much for attending this listening session. We are looking forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas. Your participation in this session is completely voluntary and you can decide to leave at any point. We will be taking notes during the session so that we may later review and reflect upon the ideas and to actively take them into consideration as we stand up the Unaccompanied Children Office of the Ombuds (UCOO). These notes will be used for internal use only and will not be shared with anyone outside of UCOO. Your identity will not be included in the notes and not associated with any responses, which will be kept private. The estimated time to complete the session today is one (1) hour. To thank you for and acknowledge your participation with this effort, we will provide you with \$75 after the session.

Please note that an agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, unless it displays a currently valid Office of Management and Budget (OMB) control number. The OMB number for this collection is: 0970-0630, and the expiration date is March 31, 2027. If you have any comments on this collection of information, please contact Leah Chavla, Senior Advisor to the Unaccompanied Children Ombuds, at leah.chavla@acf.hhs.gov or 202-838-3307.

The UCOO is an impartial and confidential entity that is independent from ORR and can investigate ORR's care and custody of unaccompanied children. Based on its findings, the UCOO can help to informally resolve issues and/or to make recommendations to ORR. The UCOO is not police or law enforcement and, as such, is not involved in conducting criminal investigations. The authority for the government to set up this new office became effective in July 2024. As we are working on hiring staff and building out the office, we wanted to meet with you very early on to hear your thoughts and ideas for how an office such as ours could be of most help to you. We recognize that this conversation may bring up memories, including difficult ones, of when you or a loved one were in ORR custody. If you need to take some space during the meeting, please feel free to do so. Our goal is not to make you re-live certain experiences, particularly if they were negative; we are hosting this meeting because we want to understand how we can set this office up to be of most use to the population it is intended to benefit: unaccompanied children.

- 1) *Roles, Expectations, and Collaboration with the Unaccompanied Children Office of the Ombuds (UCOO)*
 - What roles would you want the UCOO to have on:
 - o Individual inquiries;
 - o Broader concerns (issues affecting multiple inquiries or multiple reports of the same or similar concern)
 - o Identifying positive / best practices that should be replicated?
 - Ombuds offices work 'informally.' This means that the UCOO does not have to follow the same process as ORR when addressing a concern. The UCOO can work collaboratively with everyone and make recommendations for how to resolve issues. UCOO can also publish its recommendations and reports. Having said that, the UCOO's decisions or recommendations to ORR are not binding, which means UCOO cannot force or require ORR to follow its recommendations. With this in mind, are there other activities or duties you think the UCOO should conduct?

- How can UCOO best collaborate with:
 - o Unaccompanied children?
 - o Their families and/or sponsors?
 - o Can you provide some concrete examples? (For instance, if 'periodic meetings' are suggested, additional details related to cadence/structure/desired outcome(s) of the meeting are helpful.)
- What do you think success looks like for the UCOO? How can the UCOO best meet its mission?

2) *Intake Form and Outreach*

People who wish to reach out to the UCOO about the care or custody of unaccompanied children may do so right now via email or through a form you can submit online. As a reminder all inquiries are confidential. The UCOO is not designed or intended to be a place to report emergencies. Currently, the form does not collect a lot of information, and individuals can submit the form anonymously. While UCOO will continue to let individuals contact UCOO anonymously, UCOO is considering adding several fields to help clarify important information about each concern, including the subject matter/topic and resolution desired (if applicable), as well as adding text to share with the person completing the form about UCOO's confidentiality policies and how the information will be used and stored. UCOO believes this will also help with its own reporting requirements and in better identifying and tracking trends.

- What fields would you recommend (if any) to add to UCOO's intake form?
- If you were thinking about submitting a complaint or report to the UCOO, what would you want to know in advance [about how your information will be used]?
- What are ways in which the UCOO make the intake form more accessible (easier to understand, use, and complete)?
- Outside of a form, what other ways/methods could UCOO use to make itself more available to individuals who may wish to contact our office?
 - o What would you recommend the UCOO develop so that unaccompanied children in ORR custody are aware of and can confidentially reach out to the UCOO? (E.g., a flyer, a video, something else?)
- What information would be helpful to have on the UCOO website? Or is there information that needs to be clarified?

3) *Reporting*

The UCOO has the authority and responsibility to receive, investigate and informally address complaints about government actions, make findings and recommendations and publicize them when appropriate, and publish reports on its activities, so long as it is done in a way that maintains confidentiality.

- What would you recommend to UCOO when deciding whether to publish certain findings? How should UCOO determine the 'appropriateness' of doing so?
- What types of information would be helpful for UCOO to include in its annual report? (which will be made public)

- What other recommendations do you have for how the UCOO can best navigate public spaces/foster transparency around its work and build trust?
- 4) *Do you have any other recommendations or ideas you would like to share with us regarding the set up or operations of the UCOO?*