I recently visited our southern border with AAP President-Elect Sally Goza, MD, FAAP; Marsha Griffin, MD, FAAP, co-chair of AAP’s Immigrant Health Special Interest Group; and Texas Pediatric Society Vice President Mark Ward, MD, FAAP. What we saw only underscored the urgency of our work to advocate for immigrant children.

Families arriving at our southern border first must be processed, which happens at a Department of Homeland Security Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facility. Children who arrive at our border without a parent or legal guardian, or those who are separated from the relative they arrived with, are considered unaccompanied and sent to a shelter run by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Unlike CBP, ORR is mandated by federal law to provide medical and mental health services, recreation, education, legal services, food and shelter for the children in its care.

CBP facilities are no place for a child. We visited one of these facilities and saw children with bloodshot, bulging eyes - expressionless, empty and exhausted. The facilities smelled of sweat, urine and feces. Silver mylar blankets coated the cold, concrete floors, where children slept in metal cages with floor-to-ceiling fencing. We did not meet a single pediatrician.

At a humanitarian respite center where many children and families are sent once released from federal custody, we saw drawings done by 10 and 11-year-old children depicting their time in CBP facilities. The images are heartbreaking and powerful.

Pictured right: Drs. Griffin, Ward, Goza and Yasuda outside of the humanitarian respite center in McAllen, Texas.

What AAP is doing:

Since our visit to the border, pediatricians have been speaking out in the media, including NPR, USA Today, CBS This Morning and the New York Times.

The Academy is in constant communication with lawmakers, sharing our expertise and working to improve conditions for immigrant children at the border. This week, Dr. Goza was in Washington, DC meeting with Republican and Democratic Senators and Representatives to share what she saw and to ask for urgent action in the following ways:

- Ensure that children spend as little time in CBP facilities as possible.
- Ensure that pediatric expertise is available at any facility that houses children.
- Require higher humanitarian standards at CBP facilities, including for medical care, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, and shelter.
• Maintain existing legal protections for children, such as those under the Flores Settlement Agreement.

**What you can do:**

The situation on Capitol Hill is rapidly evolving, but right now, there is an AAP-supported bill in the U.S. House of Representatives that would ensure children in CBP custody have access to medical care and are treated humanely.

• **Please tell your U.S. representative to support H.R. 3239**, the Humanitarian Standards for Individuals in CBP Custody Act. [Take action here.](http://federaladvocacy.aap.org) You can also go to [federaladvocacy.aap.org](http://federaladvocacy.aap.org) and click on "Support Bill to Ensure Proper Medical Care in CBP Custody" in the Advocacy Action Center.

We have also heard from pediatricians across the country wanting to do more on the ground to help. Lending your voice to local efforts - whether that's caring for children in your practice who have been through federal custody or writing an op-ed in your local paper urging your elected officials to do more - is meaningful and important. As we learn of additional ways you can lend your voice beyond what's written here, we will be in touch.

In the meantime, following our visit to CBP facilities at the border, new job descriptions have been posted for pediatricians to work with CBP facilities in several states.

• **If you or anyone you know is interested in applying for these jobs**, go to [www.loyalsource.com](http://www.loyalsource.com) and search "pediatrician." Please email the AAP Council on Community Pediatrics at [cocp@aap.org](mailto: cocp@aap.org) to let us know you applied and to ask any questions.

And finally, you may have seen headlines about nationwide raids to arrest thousands of members of undocumented families that are scheduled to begin on Sunday. This is just one more example of a threat to exacerbate fear and uncertainty in an already vulnerable population.

• Take a look at this [list of AAP resources](http://www.aap.org) to learn more about how you can connect to local immigrant advocates and help immigrant children in your community.

We will continue to share updates from the border and from Washington. In the meantime, thank you for all you do for children.

Sincerely,

Kyle Yasuda, MD, FAAP
President