



ALLIANCE FOR A SAFE TEXAS

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Invited testimony respectfully submitted to the U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce: Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education

Hearing: "The Consequence of Biden's Border Chaos for K-12 Schools"

Sheena Rodriguez, President

Contact: sheena.rodriguez@securetheborder.us

Thank you, Chairman Bean, Ranking Member Bonamici, and Honorable members of the subcommittee, for the opportunity to speak with you today regarding the impact of the border crisis on public schools in Texas.

The border crisis has had a negative impact on public schools that is truly incalculable, however, several impacts are quantifiable that are impacting Texans and all American families. Since my research and advocacy has primarily focused on the consequences of the Biden administration policies related to unaccompanied minors, my testimony prioritizes the socio-economic costs of these policies.

At a time when our country, our schools, our children, and our families are still recovering from the educational and developmental losses resulting from Covid-era lockdowns, the problem was compounded by an unprecedented influx of illegal border crossers being released into cities nationwide, including unaccompanied minors who were enrolled into public schools nationwide.¹ Whether or not and how many remained enrolled remains unclear.

Since fiscal year 2021, according to the U.S. Health & Human Service Department, more than 400,000 unaccompanied alien children (UAC) have been released to sponsors throughout the United States.² To put this into context, over 60% of UACs released into the U.S. since 2015 were released by Biden Administration officials. Texas received the most, with over 65% of the total UACs released into our cities in almost a decade since 2021: more than 58,000.³ In my county of Tarrant in north Texas, we've absorbed more than 2,600 unaccompanied minors⁴, roughly the population of four elementary schools in the district or the entire student body population of the high school I graduated from: Trinity High School.⁵

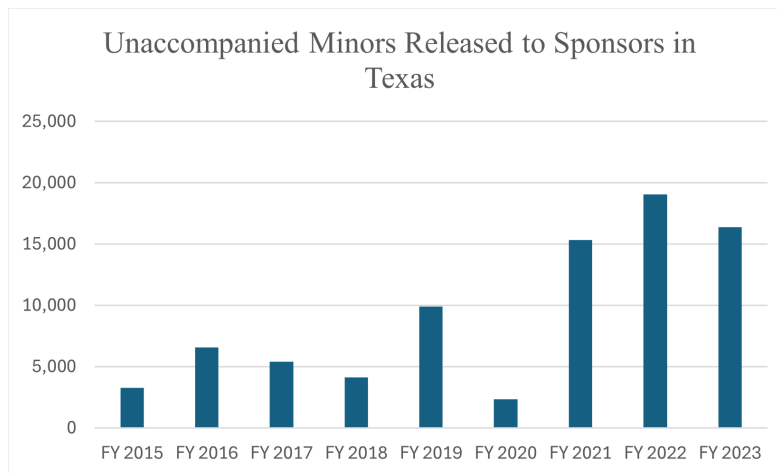


Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas, Source: HHS. Exhibit A.

These unparalleled numbers pose a significant financial, human, and quality-of-life cost to Texas taxpayers, communities, and families.

¹ Annie Ma, “Many parents don’t know when kids are behind in school. Are report cards telling enough?” *Associated Press*. Nov. 15, 2023, [Many parents don’t know when kids are behind in school. Are report cards telling enough? | AP News](#). (accessed May 27, 2024).

² U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Unaccompanied Minors released to Sponsors by State. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-state>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The Texas Tribune, [Trinity High School | Texas Public Schools | The Texas Tribune](#). (accessed May 27, 2024).

Costs per student funding in Texas public schools vary, from \$10,000 to \$18,000, depending on different estimates for the 2023-2024 school year. According to an Austin American-Statesman analysis, Texas public schools received an average \$10,387 in state and local funding per student, adjusted for inflation.⁶ Gov. Greg Abbott has explained that the Texas legislature allocated \$6,160 as a baseline in per student funding, but when other factors are included, the number “actually exceeds \$12,000.” A Texas-based economist citing Texas Education Agency (TEA) data, said, “Taxpayer funding for students was, on average, nearly \$18,000 last year at **\$17,966 per student.**” The data covers all 5.5 million students enrolled in K-12 public schools in the 2022-2023 school year.⁷

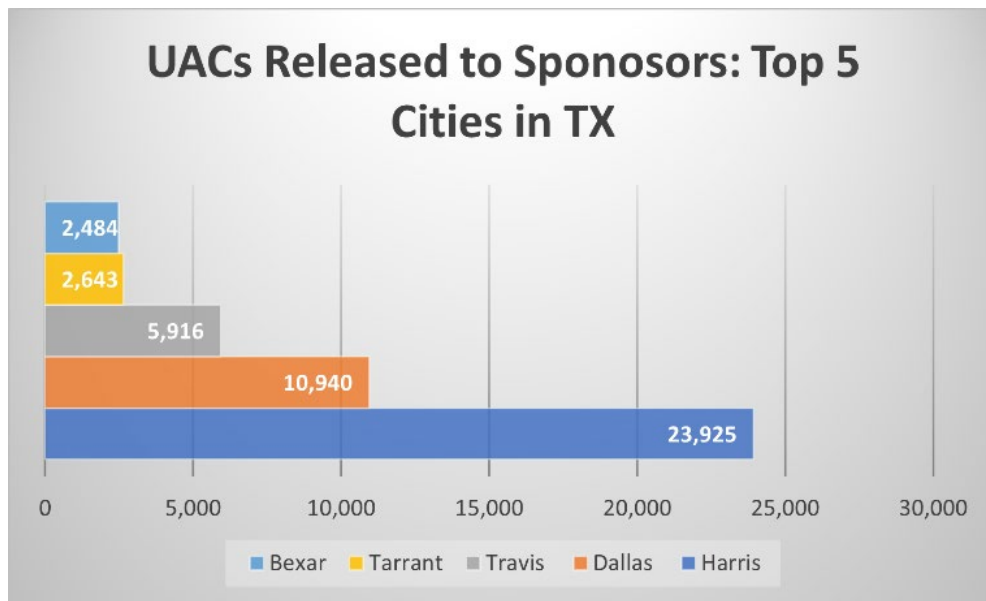


Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas (FY 2021 to current), Source: HHS. Exhibit B.

At a time when Texas school districts across the state are experiencing financial deficits⁸, using the economist TEA estimates, the baseline cost to Texas taxpayers for just the 58,000 unaccompanied minors released across the state under the current administration is well over \$1 billion for a single year of public school education. To further breakdown these estimates utilizing the economist data, in the largest county of Harris that equates to an estimated \$429 million; in Dallas County, approximately \$196 million; in my county of Tarrant, roughly \$46 million, for a single year of schooling for UACs.

The financial costs and sheer number of unvetted UACs from various unknown educational backgrounds, many of whom do not speak English or Spanish, pose significant challenges and strain on finite resources in school districts where Texas students are already struggling. According to a recent analysis, in 2022,

⁶ Keri Health and Bayliss Wagner, “Analysis: Texas schools facing lowest inflation-adjusted state, local funding since 2020.” *Austin American-Statesman*. <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/education/2024/02/05/education-texas-public-school-funding-lowest-inflation-adjusted-state-local-since-2020/72154083007/>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

⁷ Bethany Blankley, “Abbott pushes back on claim that public schools aren’t fully funded,” *The Center Square*, https://www.thecentersquare.com/texas/article_25e01416-11ff-11ef-9ace-bf86282ed2fa.html, May 14, 2024. (last accessed May 28, 2024).

⁸ Keri Health, “Austin ISD’s budget deficit balloons to \$89 million: ‘This is as serious as it gets.’” *Austin American-Statesman*, <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/education/2024/05/11/austin-isd-budget-deficit-increase-89-million-school-district-cuts/73641388007/>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

Texas 4th grade students were 38% proficient in math and 30% proficient in reading; 8th graders were 24% proficient in math and 23% proficient in reading.⁹

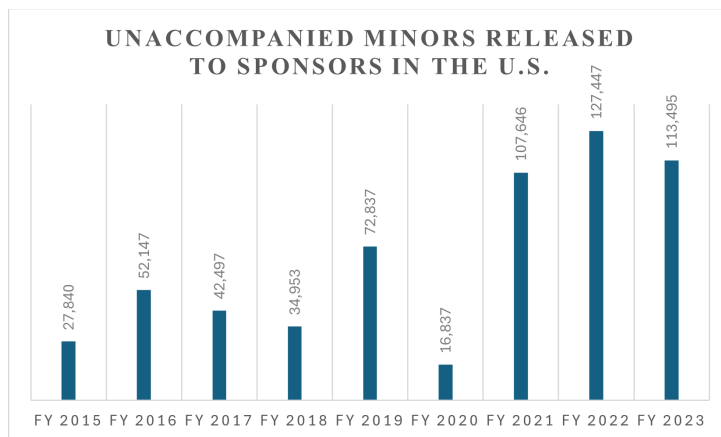


Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas, Source: HHS. Exhibit C.

Local officials in rural areas have also expressed concerns about teachers leaving lower-paying public school positions to take significantly higher-paying salaries at nearby HHS-contracted facilities. The reality is rural schools simply cannot compete with federal agencies.¹⁰ This not only exacerbates the teacher shortage but also makes it more difficult to find replacements in a timely manner in areas where qualified candidates seeking job opportunities is already limited.¹¹

Here is the sad reality of our public school system: nearly half of the existing student body across the U.S. is reportedly performing at below grade level after the Covid-era lockdowns due to failed virtual learning policies and consequences from prolonged school closures; school districts are grappling with federal Covid subsidies ending and higher inflationary costs leading to layoffs; and now unvetted UACs with potential cartel and gang ties are being enrolled in public schools.

Public schools are required to educate all children in Texas, according to the Texas Constitution and federal law. Unaccompanied minors cannot legally be turned away from receiving a public school education. UACs are being enrolled in public schools across America according to their age or grade. However, the actual level of education of UACs is difficult to determine without proper documentation, and in some cases, they have received little or no formal education and cannot read or write in their native languages, nevertheless, read or write English. As a result, taxpayers are questioning how the school districts are expected to meet the educational and developmental needs of already underserved American children who are already struggling in addition to the mass influx of migrant minors who are in worse shape.¹²

⁹ “Here’s where Texas stands on math and reading proficiency amid 20-year lows,” HeyTutor, <https://stacker.com/texas/heres-where-texas-stands-math-and-reading-proficiency-amid-20-year-lows> (accessed May 28, 2024).

¹⁰ Sheena Rodriguez, Alliance for a Safe Texas, “The Need for State Regulation and Oversight of Facilities Housing Minors in Texas.” November 2023. <https://securetheborder.us/research-publications>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Institute of Education Sciences, School Pulse Panel, <https://securetheborder.us/research-publications>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

The current system is a recipe for disaster and is frankly failing the needs of public school students, including underserved minority areas such as my own.

The grim negative impact of the border crisis on the public school system reaches far beyond the quality of education and financial strains on the schools in Texas. Public schools and Texas communities have become hotbeds of criminal activity, recruitment, exploitation, and death caused at the hands of cartel-affiliated gangs preying on our youth felt across Texas, especially in targeted metroplex areas and border communities.¹³

From 2021 to the present, local school districts across Texas are utilizing awareness campaigns such as posters and flyers in K-12 schools on campuses (some with a student body so young that many cannot even read the content), warning of the deadly effects of opioids and fentanyl-laced pills.¹⁴ Governor Abbott, the Texas legislature, municipalities, and school districts have implemented measures to expand NARCAN and other resources to areas across the state to combat the fentanyl/opioid crisis pouring into our communities resulting from the ongoing border crisis.¹⁵

It doesn't have to be this way.

If this Administration truly cared about equity and inclusion of underserved communities in the U.S., they would secure the border and prioritize the overwhelming needs of American children in our school districts first.

Since the Administration won't act, Congress must.



Hays CISD elementary school flyers, <https://www.hayscisdnear.org/fentanyl/>.

¹³ Thomas McGregor, Texas Public Policy Foundation, "Mexican Cartels Have Infiltrated Our Cities." Jan. 29, 2024. <https://www.texaspolicy.com/mexican-cartels-have-infiltrated-our-cities/>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

¹⁴ Hays Consolidated Independent School District, Information & Resources for Hays CISD Parents & Students About Fentanyl, <https://www.hayscisdnear.org/fentanyl/>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

¹⁵ Office of the Texas Governor Greg Abbott, Governor Abbott Expands Life-Saving NARCAN To All Texas Law Enforcement, Sept. 6, 2023. <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-expands-life-saving-narcan-to-all-texas-law-enforcement>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

While these efforts are notable, it is essential to note that placing NARCAN in the hands of school administrators is clear evidence that we are sorely losing the battle against the opioid crisis and subsequently failing the country's youth. NARCAN is a death preventative, not an opioid crisis preventative, and I encourage Congressional members to consider this when appropriating funds. This is not an issue that throwing money at the problem will solve, but it is a national security issue which requires secure borders and enforcement of already existing laws.

Cartel-affiliated gangs continue to target young teens inside and outside of schools to push drugs¹⁶ but also to recruit from across the state as human smugglers.¹⁷

Another concern is the unknown. As I have personally witnessed, many of the migrants and minors illegally crossing our borders do not have documentation. There are limited ways to vet anyone illegally crossing, which are often ineffective. Considering that the majority of the unaccompanied minors are allegedly older teen males according to CBP data, how many of them have criminal histories, have affiliation with gangs, or are actually adults who are infiltrating our public schools? There are several cited cases of adults posing as minors,¹⁸ UACs committing horrendous crimes in the U.S.¹⁹, and even a school district soliciting donations to assist with a minors' smuggling fee who reportedly did not even attend school.²⁰

Additionally, Texas schools along the Texas/Mexico border have endured extraordinary security issues resulting from bailouts and cartel criminal activity. Several schools have implemented additional security measures such as fences and boulders around the school grounds to stop vehicles and criminal smugglers from bailouts, illegal migrant populations released into Texas communities, and those actively evading law enforcement from entering the property and threatening the safety of children and staff.²¹

Another concern is the exposure of children and families to infectious and communicable diseases. School buses used for local students in the Del Rio area were used to transport illegal aliens to processing centers despite local elected officials raising alarms about the potential exposure to students and their families to unknown diseases.²²

It is particularly concerning when federal regulations require exemptions for noncitizens to state law which citizens are expected and required to follow. American students must show evidence of vaccination compliance or properly filed exemptions when registering. Yet, in many areas, these requirements are waived or stalled for migrant children and families.²³ In my opinion, this is discriminatory against

¹⁶ U.S. Attorney's Office, Norther District of Texas. Carrollton Juvenile Overdose Defendant Who Ignored Deaths Sentenced to 20 Years in Prison. May 22, 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ndtx/pr/carrollton-juvenile-overdose-defendant-who-ignored-deaths-sentenced-20-years-prison>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

¹⁷ Joey Horta, KXXU 25 News, "A warning every parent needs to know about: Mexican drug cartels are targeting teenagers." May 12, 2021. <https://www.kxxv.com/news/local-news/a-warning-every-parent-needs-to-know-about-mexican-drug-cartels-are-targeting-teenagers>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

¹⁸ Bethany Blankley, The Center Square, "DeSantis: 'Reckless open border policies' led to murders of two more Florida residents." Mar. 30, 2022. https://www.thecentersquare.com/florida/article_88f1c118-b06c-11ec-ba6d-3742fc64d2f4.html. (accessed May 27, 2024).

¹⁹ Stephen Dinan, The Washington Times, "Suspect in killing of 20-year-old autistic woman was newly released illegal immigrant teen." Jan. 23, 2023. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/23/suspect-killing-20-year-old-autistic-woman-was-new/>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

²⁰ Bethany Blankley, The Center Square, "Rhode Island school under scrutiny for soliciting funds for cartel human smuggler." Jan. 29, 2023. https://www.thecentersquare.com/rhode_island/article_de793aa8-9ff9-11ed-854e-c7dabf15bc91.html. (accessed May 27, 2024).

²¹ Aaron Martinez, El Paso Times, "El Paso school districts focus on safety as increasing number of migrants cross into US." May 9, 2023. <https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/2023/05/09/el-paso-school-districts-focus-on-safety-as-migrants-come-to-city/70196754007/>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

²² Alexandra Ulmer, Reuters, "Migrants on school buses? Texas town feels caught in the middle," Sep. 21, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/migrants-school-buses-texas-town-feels-caught-middle-2021-09-21/>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

²³ U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education, and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. *Information on the Rights of Unaccompanied Children to Enroll in School and Participate Meaningfully and Equally in Educational Programs*. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/focus/rights-unaccompanied-children-enroll-school.pdf>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

American students and families when illegal aliens are not held to the same standards and requirements of documentation as American citizens.

This raises additional concerns, as attempts to expand healthcare clinics on Texas public school campuses under the guise of serving the large population of illegally present students only encourages sick children to remain on school premises, along with a laundry list of concerns across advocacy groups.²⁴

Furthermore, particularly after the pandemic, mental health issues of children and teens are already of concern. As I have previously testified to Congress, I have witnessed and documented the trauma endured by many of these children.²⁵ From rape, assault, death, and other heinous acts of violence, many of the unaccompanied migrant children and those crossing as family units have endured traumatic experiences that will remain with them for the rest of their lives. Resources are already deficient in addressing the needs of American students, how much will be diverted to help non-Americans?

Conclusion

It is my opinion, that when we cannot sufficiently meet the needs of American children's education, the U.S. has no justification for pretending we can take care of the educational and developmental needs of the world's children.

The border crisis is not only negatively impacting the quality of education and resources throughout Texas schools, but it is literally resulting in the death and destruction of children, their families, and communities with the vast influx of drugs and illicit criminal activity. Sadly, the actual financial costs and the human toll resulting from the border crisis will likely be felt for generations to come.

The obvious solution is to close the border and to stop incentivizing lawlessness. Since the current administration will not do that, Congress must use the power of the purse to force it to.

Another is to allocate funds to states inundated with migrant children. I agree with Gov. Abbott when he said the expenses of educating a vast influx of migrant children flooding into Texas public schools "...are extraordinary and the times are different than when Plyler v. Doe was issued many decades ago."²⁶

If the federal government continues to incentivize crime through open border policies and fails to uphold the law, at the very least, Congress should cover the exorbitant financial costs of education, not Texas taxpayers.

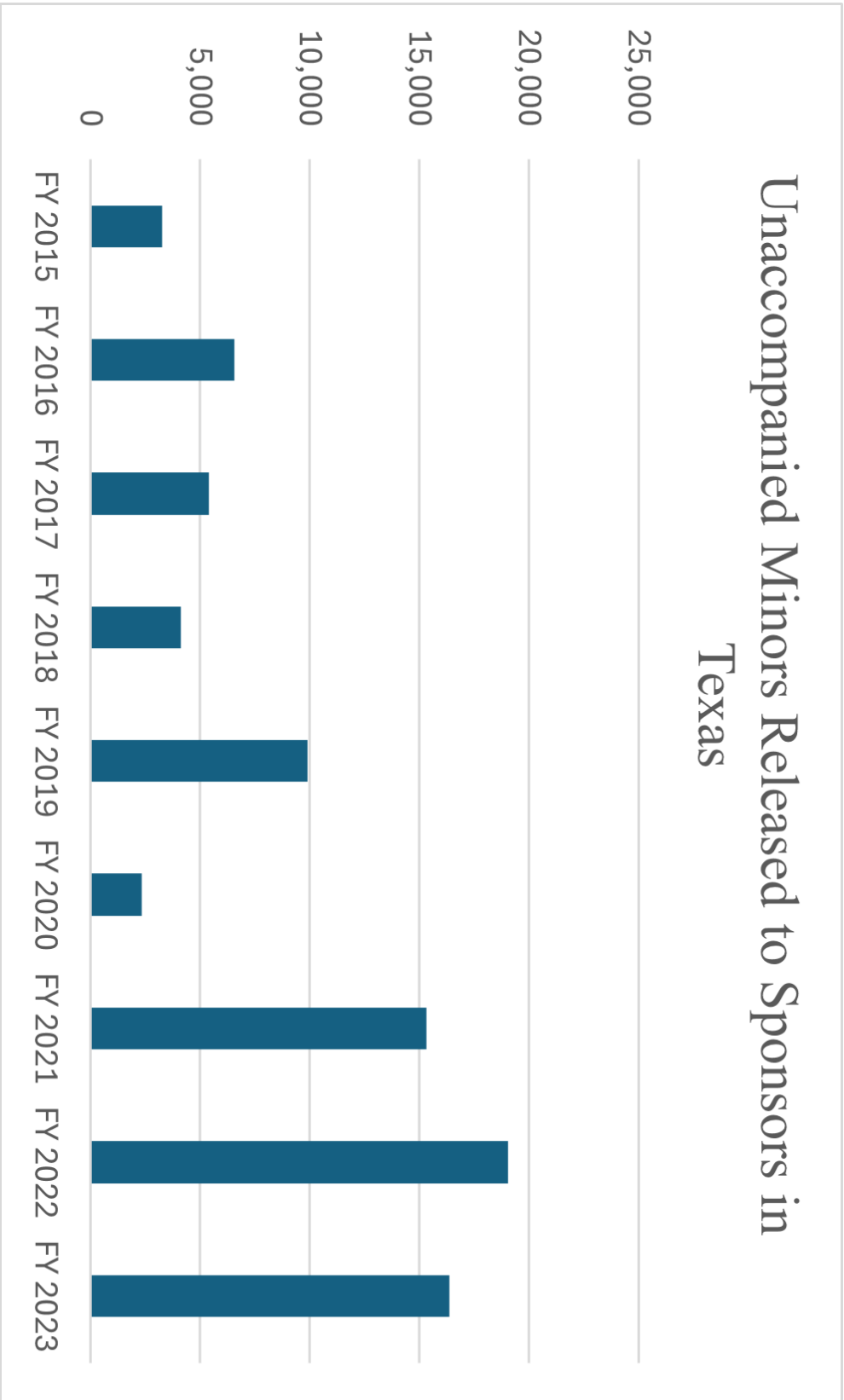
²⁴ Bethany Blankley, The Center Square, "Exclusive: Texas school considers allying with NGOs to aid illegal foreign national students." Aug. 14, 2023. https://www.thecentersquare.com/texas/article_6ff00818-3acd-11ee-8092-f304c22479d8.html. (accessed May 27, 2024).

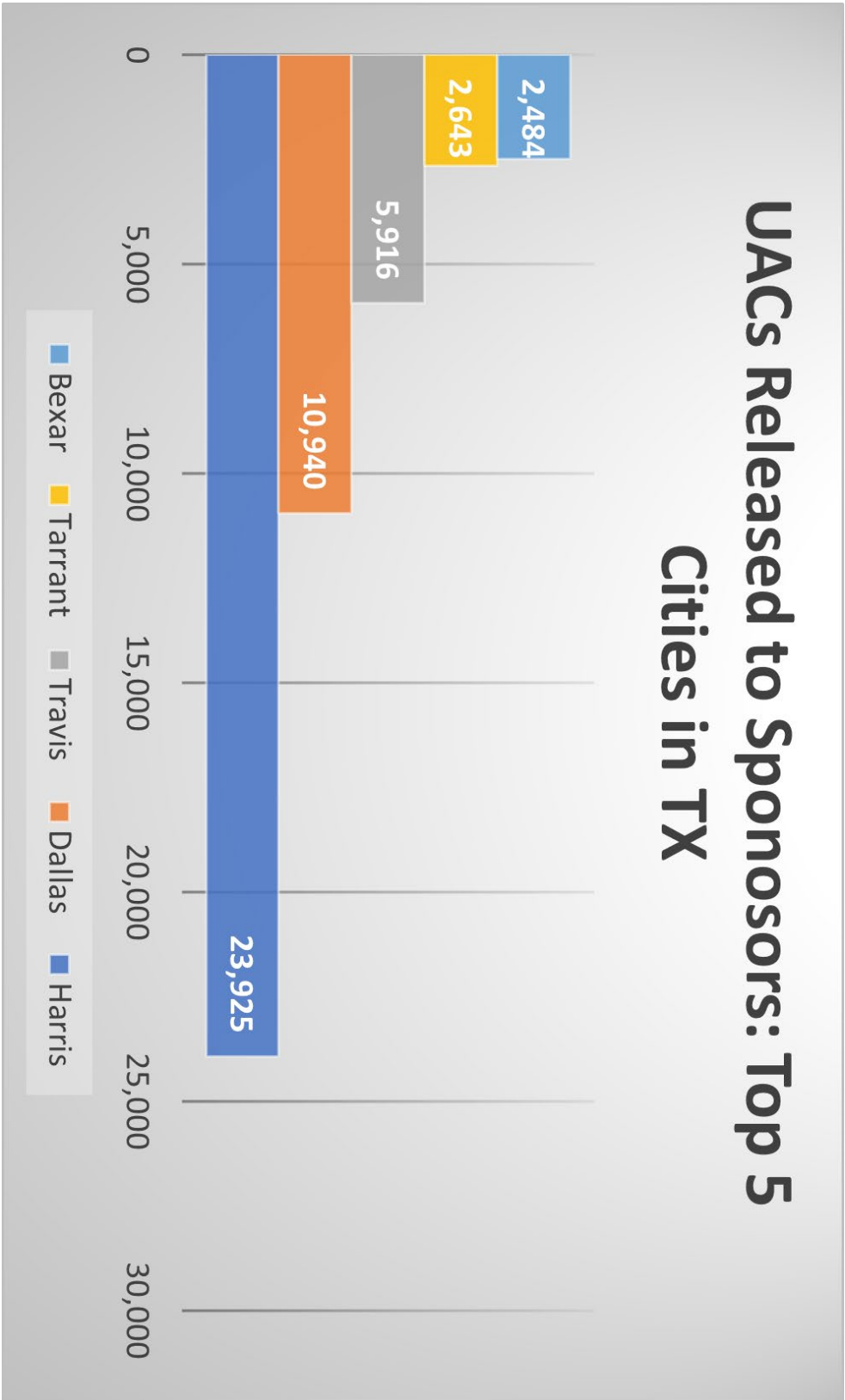
²⁵ Sheena Rodriguez, House of Representative Judiciary Committee, The Biden Border Crisis: Exploitation of Unaccompanied Alien Children, Apr. 26, 2023. <https://judiciary.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings/biden-border-crisis-exploitation-unaccompanied-alien-children>.

²⁶ Paul J. Weber, Associated Press, "EXPLAINER: Schools may be Texas' next immigration fight," May 6, 2022.

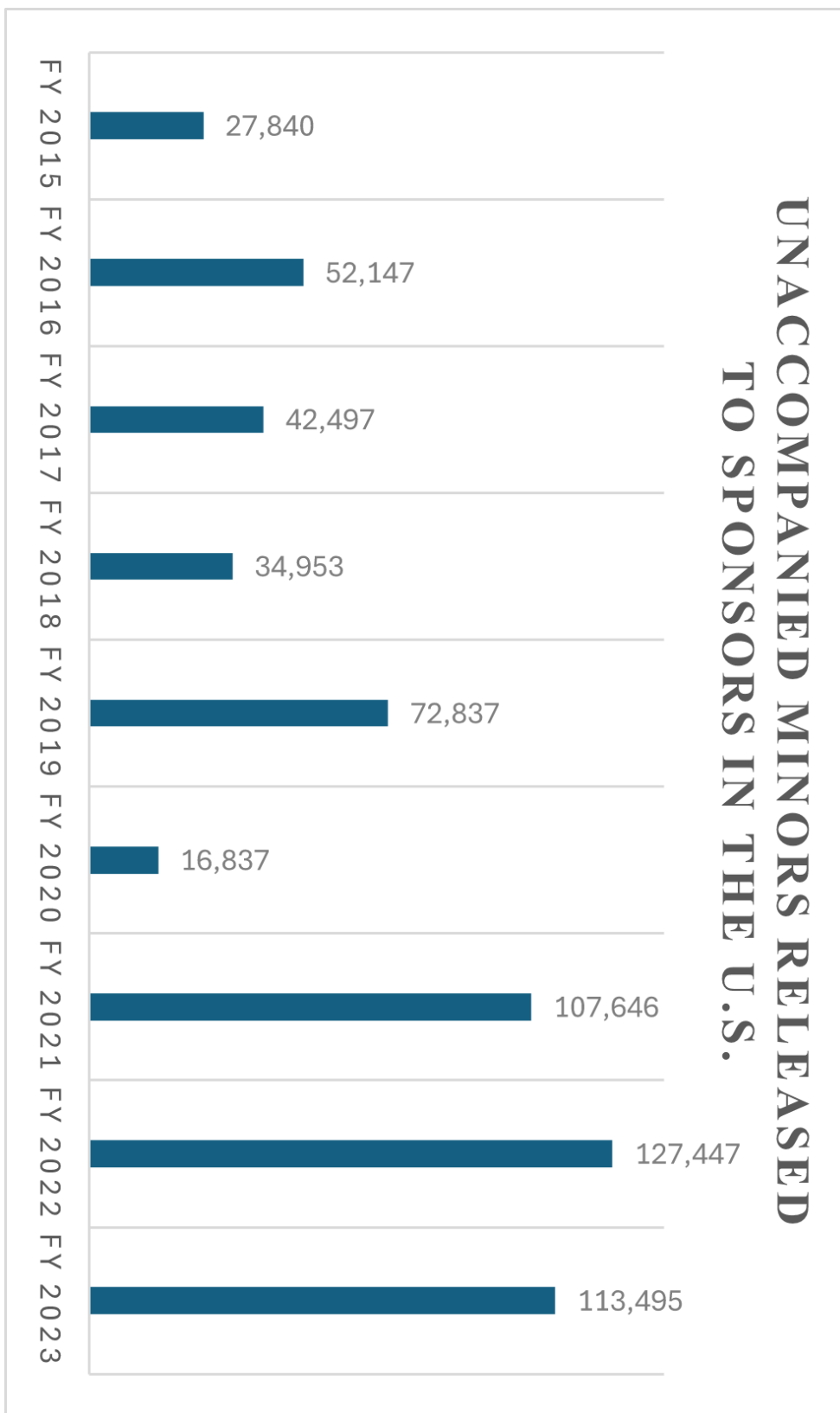
<https://apnews.com/article/immigration-us-supreme-court-texas-education-greg-abbott-e1e30a29701f6155bc7e35ecaf38bc6a>. (accessed May 27, 2024).

Appendix A. Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas, Source: HHS






Appendix C. Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas, Source: HHS



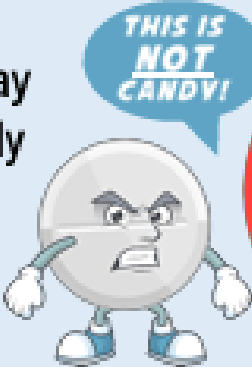
Be
SMART!


About Medicine & Pills

ONLY take medicine from your parents, guardians, a doctor, or your school nurse.

 **Medicine or pills from friends or strangers can make you **SICK**.**

Some pills may look like candy but they can **HURT you.**

 **THIS IS NOT CANDY!**



This poster is provided by the Hays Consolidated Independent School District as part of its Fighting Fentanyl campaign. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic drug that is a member of the opioid family. It is a Schedule II controlled substance under the United States Drug Enforcement Administration. (Pillar production date: October 2021) For fentanyl resources and reporting, visit: www.haysdistrict.org/fentanyl