

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 27, 2023

The Honorable Gary Peters  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs

The Honorable Richard Durbin  
Chairman  
Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal  
Chairman  
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations

The Honorable Robert Menendez  
Chairman  
Committee on Foreign Relations

Dear Chairmen Peters, Blumenthal, Durbin, and Menendez:

We face an unprecedented humanitarian crisis at our border. According to the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”), since the start of the Biden Administration, over 5.6 million have been encountered illegally crossing the southwest border.<sup>1</sup> In addition, there have been approximately 1.5 million known and unknown “got aways.”<sup>2</sup> The Biden Administration’s open border policy is facilitating the multi-billion dollar business model of some of the most evil people on the planet — drug, human, and sex traffickers.

In fiscal year 2022, Customs and Border Protection (“CBP”) reported over 2.3 million encounters at the southwest border, including 152,057 encounters of unaccompanied and single minors.<sup>3</sup> In the first nine months of fiscal year 2023, CBP has reported over 1.7 million encounters at the southwest border, including over 98,000 encounters of unaccompanied and single minors.<sup>4</sup> The *New York Times* reported that under this administration, HHS lost contact with more than 85,000 children who originally entered the country unaccompanied.<sup>5</sup> These statistics and the enclosed graph paint a dire picture of the crisis at our southwest border that cannot be ignored.

The United States Senate must continue to conduct much-needed oversight of this administration’s border policies to find immediate solutions to combat one of the most disturbing consequences of inadequate border security: the proliferation of human trafficking. The Rand

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<sup>1</sup> *Southwest Land Border Encounters*, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, (last modified July 18, 2023), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters> (this figure does not count unique individuals as some are encountered multiple times; it counts encounters).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Hauf, *1.5 million ‘gotaways’ at the border under the Biden administration: report*, Fox News, May 16, 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/million-gotaways-border-biden-administration-report>.

<sup>3</sup> *Southwest Land Border Encounters*, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (last modified July 18, 2023) (selecting “UC / Single Minors” from the “Demographic” tab to view month-by-month reported encounters with unaccompanied children between fiscal year 2020 – present), available at, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Dreier, *Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.*, N.Y. Times, Feb. 25, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>.

Corporation estimated 14,500 – 17,500 human trafficking victims enter the country each year.<sup>6</sup> In fiscal year 2022 alone, Homeland Security Investigations (“HSI”), the investigative arm of the DHS, opened more than 1,300 investigations into cases related to sex trafficking and forced labor.<sup>7</sup> In addition, human trafficking-related arrests increased by more than 50%, and convictions by more than 80%, compared to fiscal year 2021.<sup>8</sup>

Under Republican leadership in the Senate, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations led a years-long investigation into online sex trafficking occurring on Backpage.com, which the National Association of Attorneys General described as a “hub” of human trafficking.<sup>9</sup> In addition, as Chairman of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, Senator Johnson held more than 30 hearings and roundtables on border security, including human trafficking. At many of these proceedings, law enforcement officials and other witnesses detailed the countless horrors experienced by those trafficked across our border.

The devastating problems relating to human trafficking and border security remain relevant and require immediate action. The movie, *Sound of Freedom* (which is based on the true story of former HSI agent Tim Ballard’s efforts to rescue victims from a Colombian sex-trafficking ring), has played an important role in creating public awareness of this modern-day form of slavery. Given your committees’ roles in overseeing DHS, we urge you to investigate and hold hearings into DHS’s efforts to combat human trafficking. Without our attention and leadership, human trafficking will continue to plague this country.

Sincerely,



<sup>6</sup> Joe Eyerman, et al., *Labor Trafficking in the United States: Current and Future Research*, RAND Corporation (2023), available at, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_briefs/RBA1600/RBA1681-1/RAND\\_RBA1681-1.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_briefs/RBA1600/RBA1681-1/RAND_RBA1681-1.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> *Countering Human Trafficking: Year in Review*, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Jan. 2023), available at, [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/23\\_0131\\_CCHT\\_year-in-review\\_revised-23\\_0509.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/23_0131_CCHT_year-in-review_revised-23_0509.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Letter from the National Association of Attorneys General to Samuel Fifer, Esq., Counsel for Backpage.com LLC (Sep. 16, 2011), <https://www.naag.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/sign-ons/Backpage.com-FINAL-9-16-11.pdf>.

*[Handwritten signature]*

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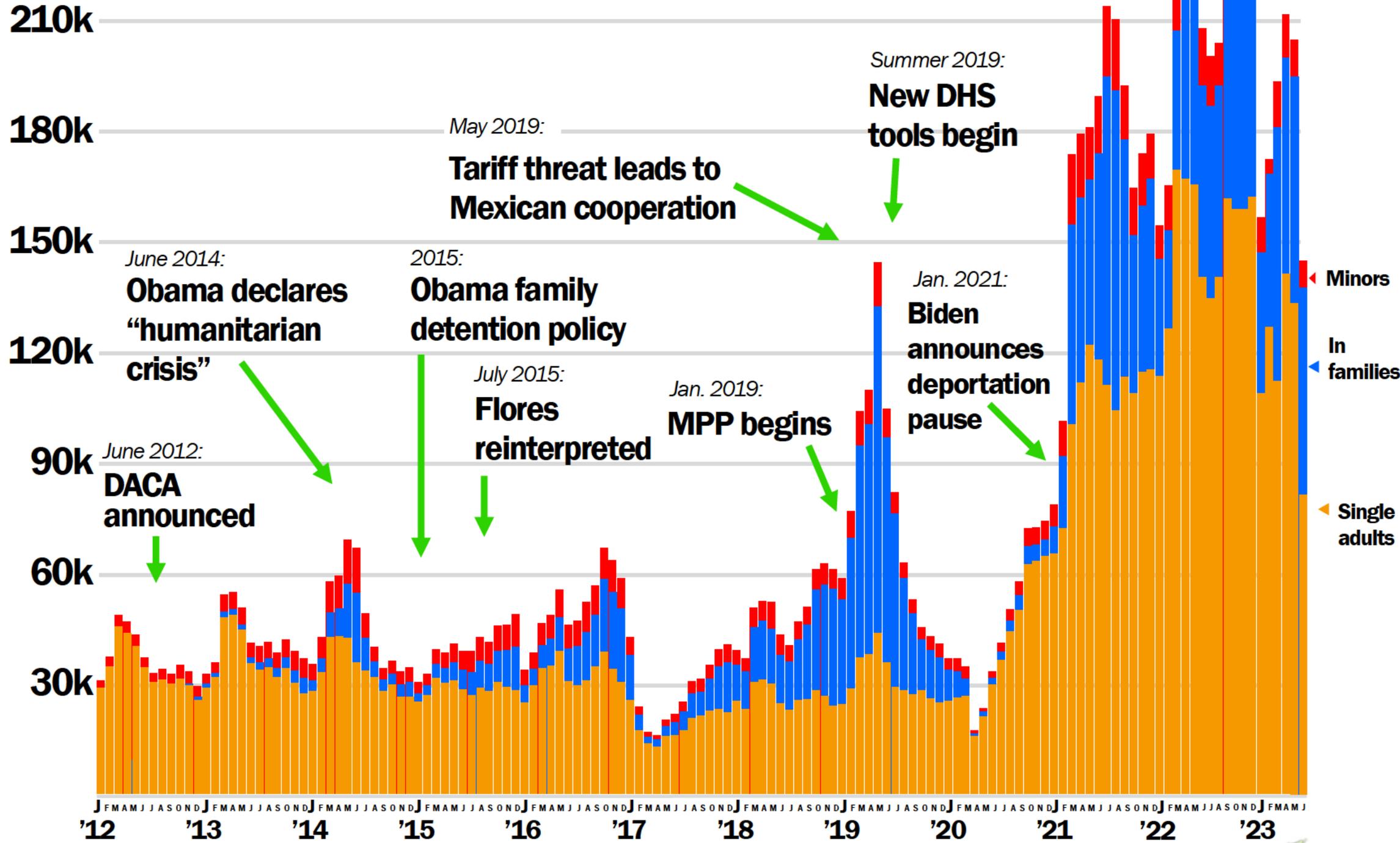
Thom Ellis

Susan Collins

**Enclosure**

# SW BORDER ENCOUNTERS

MONTHLY TOTALS BY BORDER PATROL AND AT PORTS OF ENTRY



Customs and Border Protection. 2012 figures combine single adults and families.