

Biden administration reopens Trump-era child migrant detention facility in Texas

Kevin Reed
23 February 2021

Hundreds of migrant teens are being moved by the Biden administration into a child detention facility in Carrizo Springs, Texas that was originally opened by the Trump White House in the summer of 2019.

According to the *Washington Post*, President Joe Biden's Health and Human Services Department—the federal agency responsible for providing services for detained migrant children—is reactivating the Carrizo Springs Child Migration Detention Facility for holding up to 700 teenagers in the coming days and weeks.

The *Post* quotes unnamed government officials saying the reopening of the Trump-era detention camp is necessary because “facilities for migrant children have had to cut capacity by nearly half because of the coronavirus pandemic.”

The number of unaccompanied children crossing the southern US border has also been increasing, with 5,700 youth apprehended by immigration authorities in the month of January, the highest total for that month in recent years.

The Carrizo Springs facility was opened by the Trump administration in June 2019 to confine migrant youth ages 13-17 at the height of Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) apprehension of immigrants entering the US. It also coincided with the xenophobic campaign that was being whipped up by Trump and his fascistic base as a central plank in the Republican Party presidential reelection platform.

At the time, the Trump administration presented Carrizo Springs as a “youth shelter” and “childcare facility” in contrast to images and reports of migrant children being held under horrendous conditions and locked in cages by CBP. However, the camp was closed down less than one month after it was opened due to a decline in the number of detainees and complaints from the right wing that the cost of

detainment at Carrizo Springs was too high, between \$750 and \$800 per day per child.

The Biden administration is touting the Carrizo Springs camp—located 125 miles southwest of San Antonio—as a moving away from the “law enforcement focused” approach of the previous government and making “child welfare” more centric.

The *Post* report portrayed the 66-acre detention camp as a virtual paradise where “groups of beige trailers encircle a giant white dining tent, a soccer field and a basketball court. There is a bright blue hospital tent with white bunk beds inside. A legal services trailer has the Spanish word ‘Bienvenidos,’ or welcome, on a banner on its roof.” However, it appears that all of this was actually there already, “The most colorful trailer is at the entryway, where flowers, butterflies and handmade posters still hang on its walls from Carrizo's first opening in 2019.”

Immigrant rights activists and lawyers have pointed to the fact that President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris campaigned on a pledge to reverse Trump's immigration policies. Linda Brandmiller, a San Antonio-based immigration lawyer who represents unaccompanied minors, told the *Post*, “It's unnecessary, it's costly, and it goes absolutely against everything Biden promised he was going to do. It's a step backward, is what it is. It's a huge step backward.”

During the Tuesday press briefing, Biden White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki was asked why the administration was reopening the facility. A reporter asked Psaki how the Biden policy is any different from Trump's, given that candidate Kamala Harries had said Trump was “keeping babies in cages” and “committing human rights abuse” at this same facility.

Psaki replied, “This is not kids being kept in cages. ...

This is a facility that was opened that's going to follow the same standards as other HHS facilities. It is not a replication. Certainly not. That's—that is never our intention of replicating the immigration policies of the past administration.”

An aspect of the continuity between the two administrations is the fact that facilities such as Carrizo Springs are operated by private firms under contract with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), the agency within HHS that is responsible for “unaccompanied alien children.” These contractors are officially designated as “care providers” through a licensing procedure and then awarded substantial contracts, “to provide residential care for children, including shelter, group, foster care, staff-secure, secure, therapeutic or residential treatment care for children,” according to the ORR website.

While the Democrats are claiming that the migrant youth facilities are moving away from prior law enforcement emphasis, the company that is under contract to run Carrizo Springs called BCFS Health and Human Services—formerly Baptist Child and Family Services founded in 1944—is a non-profit organization that previously served as a contractor for the juvenile probation services in the state of Texas.

In 2019, the San Antonio-based BCFS had revenue of \$537 million and at least six executives at the company earned salaries of between \$250,000 and \$350,000. Meanwhile, a 2019 report in the *Texas Tribune* revealed that six executives at Southwest Key—a non-profit company that houses migrant children in Texas, California and Arizona under contract with the federal government—earned salaries of \$1 million or more in 2017, according to tax filings.

As reported by the *Washington Post*, Juan Sanchez, founder of Southwest Key Programs, the Texas-based nonprofit, earned \$3.6 million in 2017. Sanchez resigned from the company in early 2019, but the billion-dollar agreements between HHS and Southwest Key remain in place. It is no accident that instances of sexual abuse of child migrant detainees were reported in 2019 at the Southwest Key facility in Phoenix, Arizona.

As with the state apparatus at every level, from local police departments to the strike forces of US imperialism to the black ops assassination squads, there is a complex web of connections between private

business owners—many of them ex-law enforcement and retired military personnel—who are making fortunes brutalizing the public and carrying out war crimes on behalf of US imperialism.

These relationships—which serve as a breeding ground for extreme right-wing and fascist politics—persist and have grown stronger regardless of which party is in the White House. As outlined by the WSWS last week, the negotiations over the Biden administration’s immigration plan have more to do with the strategic interests of the American financial elite and ruling political establishment than any concern for the conditions facing migrant workers and their families.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact