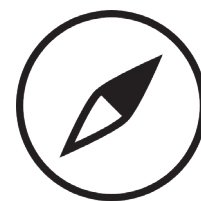


We Are North East Strong



Is North East the right location for an unaccompanied immigrant children housing facility?

What is Being Considered?

As many people in town know, Granite Ridge managed by Ehrenfeld Companies is considering the possibility of working with an organization that provides care for unaccompanied minors. The US Dept. of Health and Human Services (HHS), through its Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) conducts housing programs such as placement of Unaccompanied Children in facilities throughout the country. Granite Ridge at our old Mercyhurst North East Campus could become one of these facilities. Since Granite Ridge is in the heart of our fair town, adjacent to homes, businesses, schools, and senior care, many people have questions about this program including who the children could be, and what the impacts on our community might be.

Who are the unaccompanied children?

We do not know, and have not been provided this information. The majority of the unaccompanied children crossing the border are teenagers. According to Unaccompanied Children (UC) Program Fact Sheet, "In FY 2022, approximately 72% of all children referred were over 14 years of age, and 64% were boys. In FY 2022, countries of origin of youth in this program were approximately as follows: Guatemala (47%); Honduras (29%); El Salvador (13%); and other (11%)."

What effects could this have on our community?

Available literature clearly portrays significant dangers of criminal activity, including gang/cartel affiliation, illegal drugs, and human trafficking, as well as public health concerns.

For example, in 2017 "30% of the UAC coming across the border have gang ties". The state of Florida's THIRD PRESENTMENT OF THE TWENTY-FIRST STATEWIDE GRAND JURY REGARDING UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILDREN (UAC) heard evidence and "According to the testimony of the Border Patrol's acting chief, even as far back as 2017 it was known that at least 59 UAC had been identified as members of the MS-13 gang. That number has increased significantly; we received testimony that other gangs likewise send members and even have UAC members graduate to adulthood and apply to sponsor other UAC members. Entire separate facilities were required at some ORR shelters to house those UAC who were flashing gang signs, engaging in fights, and making threats due to gang affiliation." The state of Florida's GRAND JURY also found evidence that there were "adults posing as children" and "were simply taken out of the facility and released, as one manager put it, "into the wild"."

According to the Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force, "Gangs such as MS-13 target immigrant communities. MS-13 relies on networks of its members in Central America to pressure U.S. immigrant communities by carrying out threats against family members back home." Another article from Fox Business stated, "These unaccompanied minors who are already MS-13 members in El Salvador have made their way to communities throughout the country, but Suffolk County has been extremely hard hit with this program in that 4,000 minors from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, a lot of them MS-13 members before they came are now in Suffolk County". The Fox Business article goes on to say, that "the MS-13 gang has created a conveyor belt of new members by making deals with drug cartels to cross the Mexican border." And that "The cartels make arrangements for them to cross the border, get them train tickets or bus tickets to come up to Suffolk County [New York]". Do we want gangs targeting our community?

A recent hearing on the Oversight of the Office of Refugee Resettlement's Unaccompanied Alien Children Program in Congress concluded that "ORR negligence has endangered UAC" and that "the ORR director couldn't answer questions about the reports that show HHS has lost contact with more 85,000 migrant children in the past two years."

Senator Marsha Blackburn from Tennessee states on her own website, that Customs and Border Protection has been sounding the alarm on the connection between children and human trafficking for years. The coyotes, the cartels, and the gangs use children as drug mules. They use them as sex slaves. If you don't believe me, ask anyone with the CBP why they administer pregnancy tests to little girls as young as 13 as soon as they arrive at the border." Also a recent New York Times investigation showed, "Thousands of (UC)children have ended up in punishing jobs across the country — working overnight in slaughterhouses, replacing roofs, operating machinery in factories — all in violation of child labor laws".

According to Fox News; "New York City's health commissioner announced last week (article published April 21, 2023) that the influx of migrants from the southern border -- more than 50,000 to New York City alone in the past year -- is delivering contagious diseases, including tuberculosis and polio, to our neighborhoods. The same disease threats are also endangering other migrant destinations, including California, Texas and Florida."

What can we as North East do?

We believe that the potential risks and negative impacts of conducting these programs in our downtown area far outweigh any potential benefits, and that it would be irresponsible and dangerous to implement such a program in our community. While we are people of compassion, if such facility doors are allowed to open, we will have no control over the nature of immigrants detained or impacts to our community.

We need to reach out to our representatives and voice our concerns. Rep. Mike Kelly has created a hotline to receive our concerns. You can contact this hotline by texting 814-218-0563 with a heading of: Formal Complaint on Granite Ridge Occupancy of Unaccompanied Minors in North East, PA and then provide details of your position.

A group of concerned North East citizens is preparing a petition to our North East Borough Council and North East Township Supervisors to voice our opposition to potential use of the Granite Ridge facilities for housing immigrants. Information for where to sign this petition will be made available soon. Furthermore, the old Mercyhurst North East Campus operated by Granite Ridge has intrinsic value to our community. It is in our best interest to work with Granite Ridge as they develop and prove the value of their investment and build a fruitful partnership with the North East community.

Your comments are welcome at WeAreNorthEastStrong@gmail.com.

Look for updates, when available, at the North East News Journal and NorthEastPAOnline.com

¹ Department of Health and Human Services. Department of Health and Human Services. 2023, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/uac-program-fact-sheet.pdf> Accessed 24 April 2023.

² Dinan, Stephen. Washington Times. 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/jun/21/30-of-border-children-have-gang-ties/> Accessed 24 April 2023.

³ Twenty-First Statewide Grand Jury. Supreme Court of Florida. 2023 <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23734272-3rd-pr>. Accessed 24 April 2023.

⁴ Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force. 2017, <https://leitf.org/2017/12/fact-sheet-immigrant-youth-ms-13/> Accessed 24 April 2023.

⁵ Fox Business. Fox Business. 2017, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/ms-13-infiltrates-long-island-through-obamas-unaccompanied-minor-program-sheriff-says> Accessed 24 April 2023.

⁶ Fox Business. Fox Business. 2017, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/ms-13-infiltrates-long-island-through-obamas-unaccompanied-minor-program-sheriff-says> Accessed 24 April 2023.

⁷ Fox Business. Fox Business. 2017, <https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/ms-13-infiltrates-long-island-through-obamas-unaccompanied-minor-program-sheriff-says> Accessed 24 April 2023.

⁸ United States House Committee on Oversight and Accountability. 2023, <https://oversight.house.gov/release/hearing-wrap-up-orr-director-fails-to-answer-questions-about-85000-lost-unaccompanied-alien-children-flawed-vetting-of-sponsors-and-more%ef%bf%bc/> Accessed 24 April 2023.

⁹ Blackburn, Marsha. 2021, <https://www.blackburn.senate.gov/2021/3/child-trafficking-along-our-border-must-end-now> Accessed 24 April 2023.

¹⁰ Drier, Hannah. New York Times. 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/17/us/politics/migrant-child-labor-biden.html?smid=tw-share> Accessed 24 April 2023.

¹¹ McCaughey, Betsy. Fox News. 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/next-pandemic-already-here-courtesy-biden-open-borders> Accessed 24 April 2023.