



September 3, 2014

Dear Community Partners,

Over the past year, there has been a substantial increase in the number of Central American youth refugees detained at the U.S. border. The vast majority of these youth are unaccompanied children fleeing from violence and abuse in their home countries, largely Honduras, Guatemala or El Salvador – all Central American countries that have among the highest murder rates worldwide. These innocent children have come to the U.S. in hope for a better life.

It is important that we as leaders, advocates, City employees and members of the community help these children feel welcome here in San Francisco, a Sanctuary City. They should feel safe when they visit a public health clinic, go to school or seek out City services. We already have in place services in multiple languages, a comprehensive public health network, and a school district with specific programs for immigrant students. San Francisco also maintains a Municipal ID program (City ID) that allows residents, regardless of their immigration status, access to services. But there is much more that we and leaders across the nation can do.

That is why as Mayor of this great city and as the son of immigrants, I several months ago tasked our City family to work together with our communities to respond to the specific needs of these youth, to assist with shelter, social services, legal assistance and language services for them and their families or sponsors. The City has responded, and will continue to respond as long as needed. Please see below for a brief summary of activities to date.

In July I hosted a federal briefing at City Hall for community service providers, philanthropists and City leadership. At this meeting I was joined by Instituto Familiar de la Raza, CARECEN and others from the community, the Zellerbach Foundation and California HealthCare Foundation from philanthropy, and the Interfaith Council from the faith-based community. This meeting helped to establish San Francisco as a City eager to help and be part of the solution.

We developed and translated a resource guide designed for unaccompanied minors, which provides information about where children and their families can access culturally competent services. San Francisco 311 will direct callers to this resource, and the federal government is working with us to provide materials directly to families at the time of placement. The Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs will also post updates, resources and additional information as needed.

Visit: www.sfgov.org/oceia

In August I traveled to Sacramento to emphasize to State leadership the importance of coordinated legal representation. Since this visit, Attorney General Kamala Harris has challenged private law firms to provide pro bono hours, and Governor Jerry Brown put forward legislation that will provide \$3million for legal services. Through a program founded by Board of Supervisors President David Chiu, the City also recently awarded \$100,000 to the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights to help coordinate services.

I've also joined other California Mayors across the state in writing a letter to our Federal government, calling on all localities to respond to this crisis with a helping hand and eye toward the safety and stability of these children.

The City is already caring for these children in primary care clinics and at San Francisco General Hospital. The Health Department is providing mental health trainings to community organizations and arranging culturally competent medical and behavioral health home visits. Ensuring that 100 percent of the population receives access to health care continues to be a top priority.

The school district is hiring a coordinator devoted entirely to the specific needs of unaccompanied minors. We are fortunate that San Francisco Unified School District is nationally recognized for their Newcomer Pathways, which provides culturally competent support services and education for immigrant students. They have added several more classrooms this year to accommodate the 241 new enrollees from Central America to date.

To date, the federal government has placed 185 children in San Francisco with sponsors; however community groups report that many other children continue to find their way here on their own. Our best estimate to date is that San Francisco will receive 300-500 children by the end of the calendar year.

I remain grateful to our network of community groups that advocate for these children and whose passion is unmeasured. My office remains available to you, to learn more about what you are doing, what you are seeing in your neighborhoods, and to find new ways to work together to welcome these children to San Francisco. Please contact Lani Kent in my office at 554-5262, or at lani.kent@sfgov.org, with any questions.

Thank you for your continued partnership on this most pressing issue for our City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edwin M. Lee', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Edwin M. Lee
Mayor