From Safety Nets to Barbed Wire

More details about HHS Secretary Azar using HIV funds to pay for detaining immigrant children.

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This July, AIDS United detailed the Trump administration's cynical and inhumane use of unspent Ryan White program money from Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016 to pay for the detention of thousands of undocumented immigrant children whom they had separated from their parents. This week, we were dismayed to learn that the Trump administration is not only taking money from federal HIV programming and other vital spending to help our nation's most vulnerable populations to pay for their draconian immigration policies again, but that they are doing so using money from the current fiscal year.

In a letter that was sent to Congressional appropriators earlier this month, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar stated his intent to reallocate $266 million in funds within HHS to be used in the detention of immigrant children through the Unaccompanied Alien Children program within the Office of Refugee Resettlement. Included in that $266 million of transferred funding was more than $9.5 million in federal HIV spending, as well as more than $1 million in funds from the CDC's Viral Hepatitis, Sexually Transmitted Infection, and Tuberculosis programs; $2.2 million from Maternal and Child Health programs; and over $12.1 million from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease at the National Institutes of Health, which could contain significant HIV-related spending.

As it concerns the federal HIV programs that are being targeted for cuts, Secretary Azar and the Trump administration have gone after funding that is of vital importance to the lives of people living with or affected by HIV in the United States. Most jarringly, the Trump administration has signaled their intent to pay for the skyrocketing costs of their detention of immigrant children by transferring $5.75 million in funds for the AIDS Drug Assistance Program that are needed to provide life-saving medications for people living with HIV. A further $2.6 million in HIV prevention and surveillance funding was also moved from the CDC that would have been used to help prevent another HIV outbreak like the one in Scott County, Indiana and to increase the utilization of game-changing interventions like PrEP. Secretary Azar's transfer request also demands the transfer of more than $1 million from SAMHSA's Minority AIDS Initiative, $131,000 from the Secretary's Minority AIDS Initiative Fund, and $5.3 million from substance use disorder Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment.

AIDS United has spoken with a person with knowledge of the Trump administration's process concerning the transfer of fiscal year 2018 funding, who intimated that the HIV money targeted for

transfer would have otherwise been appropriately spent before the end of the fiscal year on programs related to HIV treatment and prevention. Regardless, the funds will now be used to support the Trump administration's ideologically-driven escalation of the detention of immigrant children. On September 19th of this year, there were 13,312 immigrant children being held in detention by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, roughly a 550% increase over the immigrant child detention rates in May of 2017. This massive increase has been attributed both to the Trump administration's policy of forcibly separating undocumented immigrant families and to the extended periods of time children are spending in detention due to the administration's use of the immigrant child placement process to arrest undocumented adults who come forward to sponsor the children.

Any removal of federal HIV funding for purposes not related to caring for the 1.2 million people living with HIV in this country is unacceptable, but taking away federal HIV funding in order to detain immigrant children after separating them from their families is appalling and cannot be tolerated.

We call on everyone in the HIV community to speak out and demand that the Trump administration keep their hands off federal HIV funding and to end their inhumane policy of child separation. Click here to join in AIDS United's action alert to tell your representatives in Congress to protect HIV funding and immigrant children.

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