

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS



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The Office of Refugee Resettlement Needs To Improve Its Monitoring of Unlicensed Unaccompanied Alien Children Program Care Providers' Compliance With Background Check Requirements

Why OIG Did This Audit

- The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) manages the Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC) Program, which serves children who have no lawful immigration status in the United States and have no parent or legal guardian in this country, or do not have one available to assume custody and care for them in this country. All care providers are required to conduct background investigations on all employees and contractors who may have contact with children in ORR care.
- In 2021, Texas and Florida took actions to stop the State licensing of ORR UAC Program care providers. In January 2024, ORR officials disclosed to OIG that an unlicensed care provider did not conduct the required national Federal Bureau of Investigation fingerprint-based background checks and only conducted these checks at the State level.
- This audit determined whether ORR monitored unlicensed care providers' compliance with background check requirements.

What OIG Found

From September 2021 through August 2024, for the 58 unlicensed care provider facilities in Texas and Florida, ORR only conducted 176 of the 256 required monitoring visits and did not always conduct those monitoring visits within required timeframes. Specifically, ORR:

- Did not conduct 80 of the 198 required abbreviated monitoring visits (required quarterly).
- Did not conduct 43 of the 58 required comprehensive monitoring visits timely (required every 2 years).

Because these monitoring visits were not conducted or were not conducted timely, ORR missed opportunities to identify noncompliance with background check requirements. New staff may have had access to children before the care provider could verify that the staff member did not have a criminal history or a history indicating a risk to unaccompanied alien children. As a result, the health and safety of unaccompanied alien children may have been at risk.

We also noted a recent issue in Florida involving obstacles to obtaining required background checks, which arose after the audit period.

What OIG Recommends

We made two recommendations to ORR, including that it conduct required abbreviated monitoring visits at unlicensed facilities approximately every 90 days and put mechanisms in place to verify that all required background checks at unlicensed care providers are conducted.

Commenting on behalf of ORR, ACF partially concurred with our first recommendation, concurred with our second recommendation, and detailed steps it has taken and plans to take to address the recommendations.