UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

LAUREN FOUDA, as Next Friend of two minor children, *Petitioners*, v. ANGIE SALAZAR, et al., *Respondents*.	**Case no.** _____ **DECLARATION OF LAUREN FOUDA, SUPERVISING ATTORNEY AT THE DOOR'S LEGAL SERVICES CENTER AND PETITIONERS' NEXT FRIEND, IN SUPPORT OF PETITION FOR WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS**

I, Lauren Fouda, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746, declare as follows:

1. My name is Lauren Fouda, and I am a Supervising Attorney with the Detained Minors Project at The Door's Legal Services Center ("The Door"), located at 121 Avenue of the Americas, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10013. My cell-phone number is (929) 819-4367, and my email address is lfouda@door.org.
2. I have worked as a Supervising Attorney at The Door since December 2025. In this capacity, I oversee the immigration cases of both released and detained youth, including children in Office of Refugee Resettlement ("ORR") custody at the Abbott House transitional-foster-care program in Irvington, New York.
3. Prior to joining The Door, I worked for 12 years at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services ("USCIS") in various capacities, including as an Asylum Officer, a Supervisory Asylum Officer, and—between August 2022 and November 2025—as Section Chief and then Deputy Director of Refugee Operations. I received my Juris Doctor from Georgetown University Law Center in 2007; I also hold a Bachelor of Arts degree from Columbia University.

4. I write this declaration at the request of the attorneys representing two children—[redacted] (age 13) and [redacted] (age 9)—who are currently detained in ORR custody at Abbott House. My office has worked continuously with these children since I first met with them on April 13, 2026. Since that date, I have supervised the staff attorney and paralegal who prepared their asylum applications, I have advocated on both children's behalf during their immigration court master calendar hearings, and I have reviewed their ORR records.

THE DOOR'S LEGAL SERVICES CENTER

5. The Door is a non-governmental organization that provides legal services to unaccompanied children. The Door is the legal-service provider contracted by ORR for the transitional-foster-care program operated by Abbott House in Irvington, New York.

6. As the assigned legal-service provider, our office is informed when a child is transferred into Abbott House. We then meet with the child to conduct a legal screening, provide a "Know Your Rights" presentation, and, on an as-needed basis, sign a retainer agreement for individualized representation in the child's immigration case.

7. For children in removal proceedings, The Door's attorneys appear as Friend of the Court to provide the immigration court with updates on the status of the child's reunification with their sponsor. Based in part on these updates, Immigration Judges determine how removal proceedings move forward.

CARE AND REUNIFICATION OF UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN ORR CUSTODY

8. Noncitizen children are placed in the care of programs like Abbott House after being designated as "unaccompanied" by the Department of Homeland Security ("DHS"). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 defines "unaccompanied child" as a person who (1) "has

no lawful immigration status in the United States"; (2) "has not attained 18 years of age"; and (3) for whom (i) "there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States" or (ii) "no parent or legal guardian in the United States is available to provide care and physical custody."[1] Pursuant to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act ("TVPRA"), DHS must transfer designated unaccompanied children to ORR care and custody within 72 hours of encountering them.[2]

9. ORR is responsible for ensuring that unaccompanied children are timely and safely released to "sponsors." Eligible sponsors are parents, relatives, or other known adults who can provide for the child's physical and mental well-being in the United States.

10. ORR contracts with residential care providers, like Abbott House, to provide shelter and other services to unaccompanied children while they await reunification with a family member or release to another sponsor. These local, state-licensed care providers generally operate as congregate shelter facilities or transitional-foster-care programs.

11. When DHS transfers a child into ORR custody, the care provider assigns the child a Case Manager and a clinician. The clinician is responsible for meeting with the child approximately once a week to provide therapeutic support. Clinicians also conduct "family sessions" with the children and their proposed sponsors to assess the relationship, evaluate the sponsor's ability to provide for the child emotionally, and identify possible risks to the child. Children often refer to their assigned clinician as a "therapist," though children's conversations with ORR clinicians are not confidential.

---

[1] Pub. L. No. 107-296, § 462(g)(2), 116 Stat. 2135, 2205 (codified at 6 U.S.C. § 279(g)(2)).
[2] Pub. L. No. 110-457, § 235(b)(3), 122 Stat. 5044, 5077 (2008) (codified at 8 U.S.C. § 1232(b)(3)).

12. Children must leave ORR custody before or on their 18th birthday. If a child remains in ORR care on their 18th birthday, they are transferred to Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE"), either by being released on their own recognizance (ROR'ed) or by being placed directly in adult detention. Children who are ROR'ed are often required to report regularly to ICE, and they remain vulnerable to detention by the agency.

RECENT CHANGES TO THE ORR SPONSOR-VETTING PROCESS

13. Prior to 2025, the local Case Manager (or a "unification specialist" employed by a sub-contractor) was primarily responsible for identifying and vetting a child's sponsor. After conducting an evaluation, the Case Manager or unification specialist would provide a recommendation to an ORR Federal Field Specialist ("FFS"), who would in turn make a final decision on the child's release to the proposed sponsor.

14. Under the former system, both clinicians and Case Managers were required to enter notes into ORR's data-management system (the "UC Portal"). Legal-service providers, like The Door, were able to request and review those records with signed permission from the child and proposed sponsor. As part of standard procedure, The Door would routinely request and review records maintained in the UC Portal to learn about developments in children's reunification processes.

15. Around August 2025, in addition to other changes, ORR created a new internal entity, the Division of Sponsor Administration ("DSA"). Staffed by ORR Federal Field Specialists, the DSA has assumed responsibility for the sponsor-vetting process previously performed by local Case Managers and unification specialists. The DSA FFS assigned to a child's case may be based anywhere in the country.

16. Under the new system, the assigned DSA FFS collects sponsor information and issues a positive or negative sponsor-suitability determination. The DSA FFS then submits that determination for review by the local Case Manager and a Case Coordinator (an ORR contractor responsible for reviewing cases and making release recommendations). If the Case Manager and Case Coordinator recommend release, a separate FFS within ORR's Division of Case Administration ("DCA") reviews the recommendation and makes the final decision on release.[3]

17. Records created and maintained by DSA and DCA are not uploaded to the UC Portal and are therefore not easily accessible to legal-service providers like The Door. As such, our legal team's only method of obtaining detailed information about sponsor vetting and the reunification process is to speak with the child's proposed sponsor or to request information directly from the FFS assigned to a child's case.

THE CASES OF [redacted] AND [redacted]

18. The information contained in this declaration regarding the minors [redacted] and [redacted] is based on my office's communications with ORR staff or agents (including Abbott House staff and assigned FFSs), my office's review of ORR records, our internal records, and my personal knowledge.

19. [redacted] is a 13-year-old child was how was born in [redacted] in 2013. [redacted] is a 9-year-old child, [redacted]'s sibling, who was born in [redacted] in 2016. Both children were assigned female at birth but use masculine pronouns and names other than those given by their parents. Each expresses nonconformity with feminine gender stereotypes.

[3] The DCA FFS may approve release, deny release, or remand the case to the DSA FFS and care provider for further assessment. The DCA FFS's decision also receives further review from superiors within ORR.

20. On or about January 31, 2026, [redacted] and [redacted] entered the United States, together but unaccompanied by a parent or legal guardian, near Lukeville, Arizona. Officials with Customs and Border Patrol apprehended and detained both minors and designated them as unaccompanied children.

21. On February 5, 2026, DHS placed [redacted] and [redacted] into ORR custody at Rising Ground, a care provider in New York. On April 8, 2026, ORR transferred both children to the Abbott House transitional-foster-care program in Irvington, New York, where they remain today.

22. Because The Door is the assigned legal-service provider at Abbott House, our paralegal staff met with [redacted] and [redacted] on April 16, 2026 to provide "Know Your Rights" materials. We also offered and subsequently provided court-preparation services for their future appearances before the immigration court.

Immigration proceedings

23. DHS issued both [redacted] and [redacted] a Notice to Appear ("NTA") on February 1, 2026, thus placing them into removal proceedings under 8 U.S.C. § 1229a. The NTAs charged both children as inadmissible to the United States for being present without prior admission or parole under 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(6)(A)(i) and for lacking a valid entry document under 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(7)(A)(i)(I).

24. While meeting on April 22, 2026 with The Door's staff attorneys in preparation for an upcoming immigration-court hearing, [redacted] and [redacted] indicated that they wished to remain in the United States and to reunite with their mother, who was living in Rhode Island. They also expressed fear of returning to [redacted]

25. On May 26, 2026, The Door met with [redacted] and [redacted] to review and sign a "Limited Representation Retainer Agreement," agreeing that our office would assist both children in filing, *pro se*, a Form I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal. An attorney and a paralegal from our office subsequently met with [redacted] and [redacted] to conduct thorough legal interviews to prepare both children's I-589 asylum applications.

26. In discussing their asylum claims with our staff, [redacted]

27. On June 15, 2026, The Door assisted [redacted] and [redacted] in filing *pro se* asylum applications, by mail, with the USCIS Asylum Office pursuant to the TVPRA.[4] USCIS acknowledged receipt of the applications as of June 17, 2026. Because USCIS has initial jurisdiction over the asylum applications submitted by [redacted] and [redacted], the New York Varick Immigration Court terminated their removal proceedings on July 7, 2026.

28. In notices dated July 2, 2026, the New York Asylum Office in Bethpage, New York directed [redacted] and [redacted] to attend interviews on their asylum applications on

[4] Under a statutory provision implemented by the TVPRA, asylum officers "have initial jurisdiction over any asylum application filed by an unaccompanied . . . child." 8 U.S.C. § 1158(b)(3)(C).

August 10, 2026. Because both children, at that time, were still without legal representation, my office assisted them on July 16, 2026 in filing requests for rescheduling of their interviews. To my knowledge, those requests remain pending without a response at this time.

Reunification and sponsor vetting

29. When [redacted] and [redacted] arrived in the United States in January 2026, their mother, [redacted] ("Ms. [redacted]"), was already living in [redacted], Rhode Island. On February 5, 2026—the same day that [redacted] and [redacted] arrived in ORR custody—the agency identified Ms. [redacted] as a potential sponsor. Because [redacted] and [redacted] had a parent available to serve as their sponsor, ORR designated them as "Category 1"—the most preferential type of reunification case.[5]

30. As soon as [redacted] and [redacted] arrived in ORR custody, Ms. [redacted] took steps at ORR's request to demonstrate her suitability as a sponsor. These steps included

---

[5] ORR releases children to sponsors in the following order of preference: (i) a parent; (ii) a legal guardian; (iii) an adult relative; (iv) an adult individual or entity designated by the parent or legal guardian; (v) a licensed program willing to accept legal custody; or (vi) an adult individual or entity seeking custody, when no other likely alternative to long-term ORR custody is available. Off. of Refugee Resettlement, Admin. for Child. & Fams., U.S. Dep't of Health & Hum. Servs., Unaccompanied Alien Children Bureau Policy Guide § 2.2.1 (July 6, 2026), https://acf.gov/orr/policy-guidance/unaccompanied-children-bureau-policy-guide.

Under this preference system, ORR groups unaccompanied children's cases into four categories:

- Category 1: Parent or legal guardian. This includes qualifying step-parents that have legal or joint custody of the child or teen.
- Category 2: A brother; sister; grandparent or other immediate relatives (e.g., aunt, uncle, first cousin). This includes biological relatives, relatives through legal marriage, and half-siblings.
- Category 3: Other sponsor, such as distant relatives, unrelated adult individuals, or an institutional/organizational Sponsor.
- Category 4: No sponsor identified.

Id.

completing an extensive sponsor application and sponsor care agreement; confirming her identity with a government-issued identification document; providing proof of her address, income, and social-security number; submitting to fingerprinting and DNA collection and analysis; undergoing a background investigation; and participating in a home study. ORR records that I have reviewed confirm that Ms. [redacted] completed each of these sponsorship prerequisites promptly, efficiently, and as instructed.

31. Neither the assigned Abbott House Case Manager, Roger Devers, nor ORR personnel have raised to my office any concerns, like a criminal or child-protection history, identified in Ms. [redacted]'s background. No one has alleged that Ms. [redacted]'s identity is unconfirmed or that she is not the children's biological mother. In fact, no official involved in the sponsor-vetting processes has ever indicated to my office that Ms. [redacted] is not a suitable sponsor for [redacted] and [redacted] or that she is unable to provide for their physical and mental wellbeing. They have also never raised concerns that either child poses a risk to himself or to anyone else.

Deteriorating condition during prolonged family separation in government custody

32. [redacted] and [redacted] have now endured six months of separation from their mother as a result of the government's delay and refusal, to this point, to reunify them. Given their young age and trauma histories, these children are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with this protracted and unexplained confinement and dislocation.

33. When staff from my office have met with [redacted] and [redacted] at Abbott House, they have appeared distracted and had difficulty sitting still and focusing. [redacted] has expressed intense frustration at being detained for such a long period of time and has told my colleagues that he would stop eating. In May 2026, Abbott House staff provided a

clinical intervention intended to help [redacted] and [redacted] develop additional coping strategies when feeling frustrated.

34. Though Abbott House clinical staff have made efforts to support the emotional resiliency of [redacted] and [redacted], the children continue to suffer while in custody. I believe that only the children's release and reunification with their mother will alleviate their mental anguish.

CONCLUSION

35. Based on the foregoing, I have developed a significant relationship with [redacted] and [redacted] and am qualified to represent their interests in this litigation.

36. The Door and all other legal-service providers representing children in ORR custody may lose funding as of July 31, 2026, and I believe that children in ORR custody in New York may be transferred to Texas on or immediately after that date.[6]

37. [redacted] and [redacted] have endured serious trauma and a difficult journey from their country of origin, only to now face an unnecessary and unexplained period of prolonged confinement and familial separation that now exceeds 170 days.

38. [redacted] and [redacted] have a willing and qualified sponsor, their own biological mother, who has dutifully and efficiently met every requirement that ORR has imposed upon her. There is no reason for the government to continue holding these children in

[6] Veronica Escobar, Member of Congress, et al., Letter to Secretary Kennedy & Acting Director Angie Salazar (July 16, 2026), https://escobar.house.gov/uploadedfiles/quill_-_letter_137940_-_detention_of_unaccompanied_minors_in_texas_-_with_signatures.pdf; Lomi Kriel, Trump Administration Asks Texas for Help Providing Legal Services to Immigrant Kids Facing Deportation (July 3, 2026), https://www.texastribune.org/2026/07/03/trump-texas-doj-indigent-defense-unaccompanied-immigrant-children/.

custody and therefore, on behalf of [redacted] and [redacted], I urge the Court to order their immediate release and reunification with their mother.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct and that this declaration was executed in New York, New York.

Executed this 30th Day of July 2026,

Lauren Fouda

Lauren Fouda, Esq.