



Duncan Hunter
U.S. House of Representatives
50th District, California

June 24, 2014

The Honorable Sam Abed
Mayor, City of Escondido
201 North Broadway
Escondido, CA 92025

Dear Mayor Abed,

In preparation for the City Planning Commission meeting this evening, I wish to reiterate my strong concerns with granting a conditional use permit to enable the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to operate a facility for unaccompanied minors. The City of Escondido should not be asked to absorb the burdens that come with the establishment of a facility when the federal government—not municipalities—should shoulder both the responsibility and full cost.

I have reviewed the documentation related to the federal lease application and it is my firm belief that the specific site in question—the Palomar Continuing Care Center—is unsuitable to serve as a facility for unaccompanied minors. One of my single greatest concerns is the length of the proposed lease. The lease applicant has asked to lease the property for a minimum of five years, with options to extend the lease to 15 years. I've confirmed that there is no intent on the part of the HHS or the federal government to temporarily establish a care facility in Escondido. Other costs to the community, which are not paid by the federal government, will surely rise over time and present other forms of decision making to community leaders.

While the site previously served as a residential care facility for a number of decades, mainly to a senior population, the children that would be housed at the site bring a number of considerations that must be taken into account, including disruptions to the residential community. The existing site previously served individuals with limited mobility and was not intended to support a transient population requiring frequent drop-offs and pick-ups. According to information specific to unaccompanied minor program, a typical stay at a care facility is approximately 30 to 35 days. No less problematic is the lack of substantial outdoor space.

The Escondido Police Department has also expressed concerns about the potential for children to wander off the site. While HHS has proposed building a six-foot fence to help

alleviate this problem, I am concerned that this precaution alone is not enough to prevent individuals from entering or leaving the facility without authorization. Moreover, the cost of this fencing, in addition to all other structural improvements, has not been factored into the annual \$6-7 million cost of operating the facility.

Another point to consider is that the individuals who would be housed at the site come from areas that lack adequate health care screening. As such, there are higher rates of contagious diseases, including tuberculosis and measles, among populations. Even though individuals do receive health screenings upon entering the U.S., the high number of individuals undergoing screening presents room for error. This could expose the immediate residential area and school located near the facility to significant risks.

The proposed facility in Escondido cannot begin to address the more than 90,000 unaccompanied children that are estimated to migrate to our country this year. The solution must involve changes to the Administration's underlying immigration policies and a commitment to return the children to their homes as soon as possible. As I work at the federal level to address these issues, I urge the city to deny HHS's application.

Sincerely,



Duncan Hunter
Member of Congress