

Reynolds says border surge is 'not our problem,' declines federal request for help with child migrants

Iowa doesn't have the capacity to take in migrant children in federal custody during a surge of people seeking to enter the United States, Gov. Kim Reynolds said Thursday.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported more than 172,000 immigrants seeking entry to the country in March alone, up 71% from the prior month, according to USA TODAY. That includes 18,890 unaccompanied children from Central America — double what the agency reported in February.

Many of the children have been housed in temporary housing facilities. Photos from the federal agency show a temporary processing facility in Donna, Texas, where the children rested on mats on the floor with foil blankets.

Reynolds was asked Thursday morning by WHO Radio host Jeff Angelo if any of the migrants or migrant children are being moved to Iowa. She said the state was asked to do so, but said no.

"We don't have the facilities. We are not set up to do that," Reynolds said. "This is not our problem. This is the president's problem. He is the one that opened the borders. He needs to be responsible for this, and he needs to stop it."

Iowa already has issues with trying to place current foster children into homes, Reynolds said.

More: Migrant encounters up 71% in March as Biden administration grapples with border

Republicans nationally have blamed President Joe Biden, a Democrat, for causing the surge in Central American immigrants seeking to cross the border. The Biden administration has denied responsibility but has said it would treat unaccompanied immigrant children more humanely than they were treated under

the Trump administration.

On March 31, an official with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Darlene Taylor, asked an Iowa administrator how many residential child care beds and how many home-based child care beds were available to help with the placement and care of unaccompanied children. Taylor wrote that she was asking all of the states in her region: Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska.

Iowa Department of Human Services Director Kelly Garcia responded that “Iowa is not in a position to take unaccompanied minors at this time,” according to emails provided by the department to the Des Moines Register.

Iowa Department of Human Services spokesman Matt Highland wrote in an email to the Register that the decision was due to the state’s limited resources and administrative concerns while acknowledging it “is an incredibly saddening and difficult situation.”

“We have an obligation to take care of our children first and absent the resources or a clear and comprehensive plan for federal support, we were unable to accommodate the request,” Highland wrote.

House Minority Leader Todd Prichard, D-Charles City, said Thursday he was disappointed in the governor’s stance.

“I think it’s unfortunate that we’re not willing to help and to show that Iowa is a generous and welcoming state,” he told reporters. He said former Gov. Robert Ray, a Republican who welcomed refugees from Southeast Asia, “took the opposite approach. And the crisis at the border is a humanitarian crisis. Like so many things it wants to be played as a political football and ... play the blame game, but I’m disappointed that we as Iowans aren’t standing up to help.”

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