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Capstone - Final Draft

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### Beyond the Walls

In 2015, eight unaccompanied minors from Guatemala crossed the southern border because they were promised a better education by a ring of human traffickers. The Department Homeland Security picked them up and transferred them to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) where they were supposed to keep these eight children safe until they could go through legal proceedings. This protocol was not followed properly and HHS released these immigrant kids back into the custody of those human traffickers. Situations such as these make social work a hard career to understand and perform effectively. This can question the current plight of unaccompanied alien children (UACs) and if the government should be doing more to protect these children. The government should become more active when protecting this population because the current conditions of UACs are not safe, they are not trustworthy, and they destruct bonds within immigrant families.

When a child enters the American border and the government gains custody over them, it is not guaranteed that they are safe. The system can sometimes be more harmful than helpful. There have been several scenarios where the government affects UACs more negatively than positively. Honorable Rob Portman was the United States Senator who followed the story on the eight children who crossed the American border and put into government custody. He stated that these children were put back into the custody of a human trafficker. These kids were placed in an

egg farm in Ohio. Their living conditions included working 12 hours a day for six days a week. The traffickers threatened the children with physical harm or even death if the children didn't work. When the case was investigated, the government found that HHS didn't do background checks. Jessica A. Ramos, who is a staff attorney, described a story whose name was Myra. Myra was placed in a household with her uncle who had a wife and other children. After a short amount of time with her family, Myra's uncle attempted to perform sexual activities on her when she was only fifteen years old. The only other person Myra knew was her aunt who only agreed to take her in if Myra paid for all of her own expenses (Portman). Both situations prove that children placed under the governmental system can be at high risk. It is not suitable for young children to be working extra hours or to be abused by the adults around them. HHR should have a stricter policy when performing background tests on the environments UACs are placed under. Supervising households will allow alien children to find the educational opportunities America glorifies.

In Nogales, Arizona over 1,000 undocumented alien children turned themselves into the government in hopes of getting help. The current plight of UACs is not trustworthy because of the living condition these children are forced to live under. The Congressional Digest stated that children who are transferred to warehouses receive basic needs such as food and drinking water and medical assistance. Jarrett Maupin, a local clergy in Nogales who toured one of the warehouses and a member of the Progressive Christian Coalition, spoke out about the warehouse in Nogales where he says it looks like a prison when the children who come here are not prisoners. In photos taken of this warehouse, the weak living conditions are very obvious. Children ranging from infants to seventeen-year-olds sleep on thin foam mattresses and have to

use long sheets of tin foil as blankets. UACs are supposed to be placed under these warehouses for the hope of finding a sustainable habitat, but instead, are getting treated almost as if they are prisoners. They are fenced in and their freedom is limited. The system meant to protect unaccompanied minors from other countries is proving itself to be unreliable.

The separation of immigrant families when crossing the American border has been a huge controversy throughout the nation for years. Separating families is a huge risk that immigrants must always consider before entering the border. When children come to the United States with their siblings, it is not guaranteed that they will be housed together before and after an adult gains custody over them. It is not in the government's interest to protect the tight bonds that families have created in their native countries. Homeland Security states that loopholes create a "pull factor" that makes immigrant parents feel that they are being invited to trust organizations that claim federal, but actually mistreat children. These organizations collect these children, particularly young girls, and lead them to believe they will be brought to safety but are actually separated from their groups and are then molested and abused. Algeria Wilson, a social worker who specializes in helping immigrant children, stated that as a social worker, it is hard to see the destruction of families. She says the internal pain is more obvious to see than the physical pain. Being a social worker has definitely changed her views on the importance others of helping to heal other families rather than just worrying about their own. Situations in which children are separated from their siblings or even friends create huge holes in their hearts that makes space for fear.

The importance of social work in the United States should be spoken about more often. The government should become more aware of the status related to unaccompanied alien

children because the system is currently unsafe, untrustworthy, and it destructs the bonds families have worked hard to build. There is more to crossing the border than just finally reaching a free nation. There are several different hardships that immigrant families face when entering the American border. In some cases, this has led children to become victims of human sex trafficking or abuse. American social services should unite together to provide a more effective housing system for undocumented alien children and protect the diverse leaders of the future.

## Work Cited

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