



**Migration and Refugee Services  
Office of the Executive Director**

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WEBSITE: [www.usccb.org/mrs](http://www.usccb.org/mrs)

April 10, 2018

Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen  
U.S. Department of Homeland  
Security 3801 Nebraska Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Acting Secretary John Sullivan  
U.S. Department of  
State 2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

SCANNED/RECEIVED  
BY EXEC SEC  
2018 MAY 29 AM 8:25

Dear Secretary Nielsen and Acting Secretary Sullivan:

On behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services (USCCB/MRS), I write to express our deep concern over the manner in which the Central American Minors (CAM) Program is being terminated. Through our work with our Catholic Charities network, we are seeing that many children and their families have not been able to receive services, such as refugee interviews by Department of Homeland Security (DHS), that were stated by DHS to be part of the wind down. We encourage you to review the wind-down process and ensure that the program is ended in an orderly, just, and humane manner that is consistent with past practice for refugee pipeline closures. Specifically, we request that you resume interviewing cases until review is complete for all individuals who timely submitted CAM applications. At a minimum, we urge you to consider additional stakeholder engagement on the termination and alternative protection programming in the region.

The Catholic Church has a significant pastoral interest in the welfare and humane treatment of migrant children. The Church views assisting those in need as a fundamental Christian duty that is derived from the life of Christ, who himself was a migrant and a child of refugees. USCCB/MRS works to support vulnerable youth and their families in part through the CAM program. Through our network, we are proud to have supported more than 3,300 families in applying for the program.

We know from our many years serving refugees the importance of closing a refugee pipeline in a responsible and humane manner. It is our understanding that past refugee pipeline closures have typically occurred due to changed country conditions. Recent reports demonstrate that, unfortunately, such improvements in conditions have not occurred in the Northern Triangle of Central America (El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala).<sup>1</sup> Even in instances of changed circumstances, however, the best and typical practice is to complete processing on all individuals in the pipeline and to align closure deadlines with when such work can be completed. The CAM program closure has departed from this practice.

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., U.S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS / MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES, *TEMPORARY PROTECTED STATUS: A VITAL PIECE OF THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PROTECTION AND PROSPERITY PUZZLE* 5-6 (OCTOBER 2017), available at <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-policy/fact-finding-mission-reports/upload/el-salvador-honduras-report-20171016.pdf> (discussing the increase in family targeted violence in the region).



With the announcement of the CAM program wind down on November 8, 2017, the Department of State (DOS) stated that CAM cases would be considered timely submitted if filed by 11:59pm EST on November 9, 2017. We and our affiliates worked to diligently comply with this very tight turnaround date. We learned on February 9, 2018, however, that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services had stopped interviewing CAM applicants as of January 31st, even though at least 500 cases served by USCCB/MRS and most likely thousands of applicants throughout the program had yet to receive a refugee interview. Many of these children and their families had already submitted to blood and identification testing, paid related fees, and expended extensive time and resources to proceed with the application. As a result of the failure to be interviewed, many now face deep disappointment, fear, and heightened protection concerns.

Mario<sup>2</sup> and his two young daughters are just one of the impacted families. Mario feared daily for his daughters' safety in Honduras after his older son was brutally killed. It was this fear that spurred him to apply for his daughters to join him in the U.S. through the CAM program. After over a year of navigating the complex application process, he was devastated to learn of the program's cancellation. Without this vital legal avenue to seek protection for his girls, he is losing hope.

In addition to Mario's own anxiety and sadness, our program has had to spend countless staff hours performing education, outreach, and counseling to impacted families as little government-generated information and educational material has been created or shared with providers by your offices. In particular, we were disappointed to see that the DOS case closure letters were only provided in English and that they lacked information on: (1) when applicants could expect to receive DNA reimbursements; (2) where those who continue to face serious safety and protection concerns can find information on the governmental and non-profit services referenced in the letter; and (3) what the process and requirements are for applying for humanitarian parole outside of the CAM program.

In light of these concerns, we urge you to reconsider the way in which the pipeline is closed and to resume processing cases until all timely filed applicants are interviewed. To do otherwise is unjust, arbitrary, and inconsistent with years of past practice. At a minimum, additional stakeholder engagement is needed.

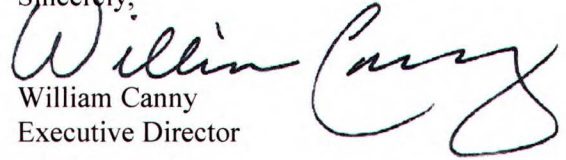
Additionally, we urge you to consider alternative protection programming in the Northern Triangle. Given the pervasive and persistent violence and persecution in the region, terminating the CAM program without alternatives in place may contribute to increased forced and irregular migration. In-state child protection institutions and other refugee programming remain insufficient to accommodate displacement in the region. Without alternative programming, we fear children will be forced to make the dangerous journey north alone, putting them at risk for exploitation and human trafficking. We are happy to engage our Catholic service network in the region to meet with you and suggest ways to partner on this very important issue.

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<sup>2</sup> Name and identifying information changed to protect client confidentiality.

We thank you for your consideration and would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to further discuss these concerns and recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'William Canny', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

William Canny  
Executive Director

cc: L. Francis Cissna, Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Julie Kirchner, Ombudsman, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services  
Carol Thompson O'Connell, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of  
Population, Refugees, and Migration





U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

August 16, 2018

Mr. William Canny  
Executive Director  
Migration and Refugee Services  
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops  
3211 4<sup>th</sup> Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20017

Dear Mr. Canny:

Thank you for your April 10, 2018 letter. Secretary Nielsen asked that I respond on her behalf.

In your letter, you expressed your concern about the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) decision to terminate the Central American Minors (CAM) refugee program. The U.S. Government ended the CAM refugee program on January 31, 2018, because it was determined that the limited Government resources allocated to the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) could be more effectively used to process populations who were more likely to qualify for refugee status. This decision was taken as part of the overall U.S. Government review of the USRAP for Fiscal Year 2018, and you can read the full report at <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/releases/docsforcongress/274613.htm>.

Throughout the duration of its operation, the CAM refugee program had an overall approval rating of approximately 25 percent, which is an extraordinarily low approval rating for populations interviewed as part of the USRAP. However, as noted in response to your previous letter, CAM refugee applicants who received a USCIS interview by the January 31, 2018 deadline will have their cases processed to completion. Individuals who were not interviewed by the January 31, 2018 deadline have received notice with further instructions.

In Fiscal Years 2015 to 2017, the United States generously provided approximately \$2 billion in assistance to Central America to address the underlying economic, security, and governance conditions that have been driving migration from the region. The U.S. Government continues to discourage individuals from undertaking the dangerous journey to the United States and unlawfully entering this country. Further, we are increasing capacity-building efforts to help countries in the region identify appropriate solutions for refugees and other migrants. DHS and the Department of State will continue to focus on refugee processing in Central America through several initiatives, such as the Protection Transfer Agreement (PTA) with the Government of Costa Rica, through the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and also

Mr. William Canny

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through the International Organization for Migration (IOM). With support from UNHCR and IOM, the U.S. Government pre-screens Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan applicants who require immediate transfer to Costa Rica, where they are then interviewed by DHS officers and considered for resettlement to the United States. In some situations, the USRAP may process UNHCR-identified cases in El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras.

We defer to the Department of State to address your questions regarding the case closure notices for applicants who were not interviewed, as the Department of State issued the notices in collaboration with the Resettlement Support Center for Latin America. Thank you again for your letter and interest in this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Francis Cissna". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

L. Francis Cissna  
Director