

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-609](#), a report to the Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

ORR is responsible for the care and placement of unaccompanied children in its custody, which it provides through grants to state-licensed care provider facilities. ORR was appropriated \$1.3 billion for this program in fiscal year 2020. GAO was asked to review ORR's grant making process and oversight of its grantees.

This report examines (1) how ORR considers state licensing issues and past performance in its review of grant applications; (2) state licensing agencies' oversight of ORR grantees, and how ORR and states share information; and (3) how ORR addresses grantee noncompliance. GAO reviewed ORR grant announcements and applications for fiscal years 2018 and 2019. GAO conducted a survey of 29 state licensing agencies in states with ORR facilities, and reviewed ORR monitoring documentation and corrective action reports. GAO also reviewed ORR guidance and policies, as well as relevant federal laws and regulations, and interviewed ORR officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making eight recommendations to ORR on improving clarity in its grant announcements, communication with state licensing agencies, and monitoring of its grantees. ORR agreed with all eight recommendations.

View [GAO-20-609](#). For more information, contact Kathryn A. Larin at (202) 512-7215 or larink@gao.gov.

September 2020

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

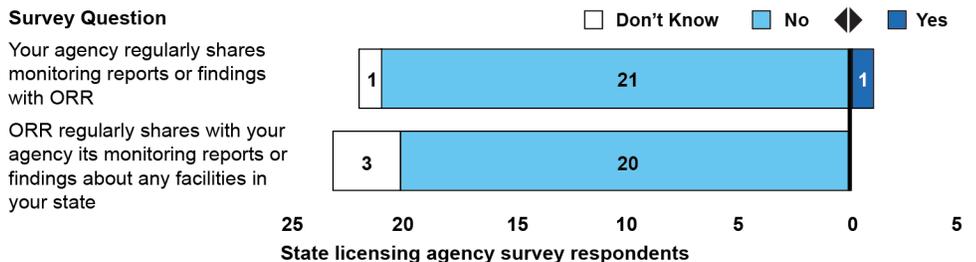
Actions Needed to Improve Grant Application Reviews and Oversight of Care Facilities

What GAO Found

The Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) grant announcements soliciting care providers for unaccompanied children—those without lawful immigration status and without a parent or guardian in the U.S. available to provide care and physical custody for them—lack clarity about what state licensing information is required. Further, ORR does not systematically confirm the information submitted by applicants or document a review of their past performance on ORR grants, when applicable, according to GAO's analysis of ORR documents and interviews with ORR officials. The grant announcements do not specify how applicants without a state license should show license eligibility—a criterion for receiving an ORR grant—or specify what past licensing allegations and concerns they must report. In addition, the extent to which ORR staff verify applicants' licensing information is unclear. In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, ORR awarded grants to approximately 14 facilities that were unable to serve children for 12 or more months because they remained unlicensed. In addition, ORR did not provide any documentation that staff conducted a review of past performance for the nearly 70 percent of applicants that previously held ORR grants. Without addressing these issues, ORR risks awarding grants to organizations that cannot obtain a state license or that have a history of poor performance.

State licensing agencies regularly monitor ORR-funded facilities, but according to GAO's survey of these agencies, their information sharing with ORR is limited (see figure). State licensing agencies and ORR staff both said that improved information sharing would benefit their monitoring of facilities. Without such improvements, ORR may lack information about ongoing issues at its facilities.

Key Survey Responses on Information-Sharing with the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) by the 23 State Agencies That Licensed ORR-Funded Facilities in Fall 2019



Source: GAO survey of state agencies that license ORR-funded providers, conducted October 2019 – January 2020. | GAO-20-609

ORR requires grantees to take corrective action to address noncompliance it identifies through monitoring, but ORR has not met some of its monitoring goals or notified grantees of the need for corrective actions in a timely manner. For example, under ORR regulations, each facility is to be audited for compliance with standards to prevent and respond to sexual abuse and harassment of children by February 22, 2019, but by April 2020, only 67 of 133 facilities had been audited. In fiscal years 2018 and 2019, ORR also did not meet its policy goals to visit each facility at least every 2 years, or to submit a report to facilities on any corrective actions identified within 30 days of a visit. Without further action, ORR will continue to not meet its own monitoring goals, which are designed to ensure the safety and well-being of children in its care.