



SOUTHWEST BORDER

Actions Needed to Address Fragmentation in DHS's Processes for Apprehended Family Members

Accessible Version

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Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2019, CBP reported apprehending more than 527,000 noncitizen family unit members (children under 18 and their parents or legal guardians) at or between U.S. ports of entry along the southwest border—a 227 percent increase over fiscal year 2018. GAO was asked to review issues related to families—including family units—arriving at the southwest border.

This report examines the extent to which DHS has identified, collected, documented, and shared information its components need to inform processes for family members apprehended at the border. GAO analyzed DHS documents; interviewed DHS officials; and visited DHS locations in Arizona, California and Texas, where CBP apprehensions of family units increased in 2017. GAO compared the information gathered with leading practices in collaboration to evaluate DHS components' processes for apprehended family members.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DHS, including that DHS identify the information its components collectively need to process family members apprehended together, collect and document that information at the time of apprehension, and evaluate options for developing a unique identifier shared across DHS's data systems to link family members apprehended together. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

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What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) processes to identify, collect, document, and share information about family members apprehended at the southwest border are fragmented. DHS's U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) apprehends family members and determines how information about each individual—and his or her relationship to other family members—will be collected and documented. Other DHS components, such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), use information collected at the time of apprehension to inform how those who are members of a family, including children, will proceed through immigration proceedings. Family members apprehended at the border and placed into expedited removal that indicate an intention to apply for asylum, or a fear of persecution or torture or fear of return to their home country, are referred to DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a credible fear screening. However,

- DHS has not identified the information its components collectively need about apprehended family members. Each DHS component collects information to meet its own operational needs, and does not consider the information needs of other components. For example, the information about family members that CBP needs differs from the information about family members that USCIS needs. CBP officials told us they would not generally identify spouses and children age 18 to 21 apprehended with a parent as family members, although USCIS's definition of a dependent for credible fear screening purposes includes spouses and unmarried children under age 21.
- CBP collects information about certain family members for its operational purposes, but does not collect and document information at the time of apprehension that other DHS components may later need. Specifically, CBP collects and documents information about parents and their children under age 18 who are apprehended together. However, consistent with regulation, USCIS policy is to include any dependents who arrived concurrently with the principal applicant, such as a spouse or unmarried child under age 21, on a principal applicant's positive credible fear determination if the dependent wants to be included. According to USCIS and ICE officials, it can be difficult to identify spouses and children age 18 to 21 because CBP does not regularly document such family relationships.
- DHS does not have a mechanism to link the records of family members apprehended together across its components that need this information. As a result, DHS components may not have access to all the information about family members they need to make effective operational decisions.

Because DHS has not identified the information all of its components collectively need to process family members apprehended at the border, collected and documented that information at the time of apprehension, and evaluated options to share that information across components, consistent with leading practices in collaboration, DHS risks removing individuals from the United States who may have been eligible for relief or protection based on their family relationship.

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Abbreviations

Border Patrol	U.S. Border Patrol
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
EOIR	Executive Office for Immigration Review
Flores Agreement	<i>Flores v. Reno</i> Settlement Agreement
Form I-213	Form I-213, <i>Record of Deportable/Inadmissible Alien</i>
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
OFO	Office of Field Operations
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
UAC	unaccompanied alien child (or children)
USCIS	U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

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February 19, 2020

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Bennie Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Zoe Lofgren
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Immigration and Citizenship
Committee on the Judiciary
House of Representatives

The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) apprehends noncitizen families arriving at or between U.S. ports of entry.¹ From fiscal years 2017 through 2019, CBP’s U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol) apprehended approximately 657,000 members of family units and CBP’s Office of Field Operations (OFO) apprehended approximately 137,000 members of family units.² In particular, apprehensions of family unit members at the southwest border increased from fiscal year 2017 (about 105,000) to fiscal year 2018

¹CBP’s October 2015 *National Standards on Transport, Escort, Detention, and Search* defines a “family unit” to include one or more non-U.S. citizen juvenile(s) accompanied by their parent(s) or legal guardian(s). Therefore, in this report, we generally use the term “noncitizen” to refer to individuals who would meet the definition of “alien.” The Immigration and Nationality Act defines the term “alien” as “any person not a citizen or national of the United States.” See 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(3). In addition, for the purposes of this report, we use the term “parent” to refer to “noncitizen parent(s) or legal guardian(s).”

²Border Patrol apprehends families between ports of entry, and OFO encounters families that arrive at ports of entry. According to CBP officials, OFO encounters individuals (instead of apprehending them) because, at ports of entry, individuals do not enter the United States until OFO officers have processed them. For the purposes of this report, we use the term “apprehend” to describe both Border Patrol and OFO’s first interactions with families at the border. Further, OFO typically refers to its officers as “Customs and Border Protection officers”; we use the term “OFO officers” in this report for clarity in differentiating between Border Patrol and OFO.

(about 161,000), and further increased dramatically in fiscal year 2019 (to about 527,000), according to CBP data.

When CBP apprehends individuals who are determined to be ineligible for admission into the United States, or otherwise removable, and who claim to be related, Border Patrol agents and OFO officers make decisions about how information about each individual and his or her relationship to other family members will be documented. In addition, agents and officers decide, on a case by case basis and in consultation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), whether each individual will be detained, released to await immigration removal proceedings, or removed from the United States. In full immigration removal proceedings, noncitizens may apply for various forms of protection or relief, including asylum.³ If placed into expedited removal proceedings instead of full removal proceedings, noncitizens are to be ordered removed from the United States, without further hearing before an immigration judge, unless they indicate an intention to apply for asylum, a fear of persecution or torture, or a fear of return to their home country (referred to throughout this report as making a “fear claim”).⁴ In such cases, they are referred to DHS’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) for a credible

³U.S. immigration law provides that noncitizens physically present within the United States, whether or not at a designated port of arrival, may be granted asylum if they are found to be unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of past persecution, or a well-founded fear of future persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The laws governing asylum protection were first established in statute with the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, Pub. L. No. 96-212, tit. II, § 201, 94 Stat. 102, 102-06 (1980) (codified at 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101(a)(42), 1157-1159). The legal standard for a refugee and asylee are generally the same, but noncitizens must apply for refugee status from outside the United States and for asylum status from within the United States. Additionally, if they are precluded from obtaining asylum based on, for example, past convictions of serious crimes, but their life or freedom would be threatened based on the protected grounds or would be tortured if removed, the individual may also seek withholding of removal and deferral of removal. See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101(a)(42), 1157-1159; See 8 U.S.C. § 1231(b)(3); 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.13(c) (establishing a number of grounds for mandatory denial of asylum, including, among others, conviction of certain crimes, being reasonably regarded as a danger to the security of the United States, and the third country asylum bar), 208.16 (codifying both withholding of removal under the Immigration and Nationality Act and the Convention against Torture). For the purposes of this report, we refer to withholding of removal under the Immigration and Nationality Act and withholding of removal under the Convention against Torture collectively as “withholding of removal.”

⁴See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1225(b), 1229a; see also 8 C.F.R. § 235.3(b)(4).

fear screening.⁵ In February 2020, we reported that USCIS's credible fear caseload nearly doubled from fiscal years 2015 to 2016 (approximately 48,000 to 92,000 cases) and generally remained at that level through fiscal year 2018.⁶

Other DHS components, such as ICE and USCIS, and other federal agencies, such as the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), use information collected at the time individuals are apprehended to inform how those who are members of a family, including children, will proceed through immigration proceedings.

You asked us to review issues related to families arriving at the southwest border. This report examines the extent to which DHS has identified, collected, documented, and shared information its components need to inform processes for family members apprehended at the border.

To address this objective, we reviewed policy documents, forms, training materials, data system documentation, and other guidance documents related to how information about relationships among family members apprehended at the border is identified, collected, documented, and shared by DHS components. We reviewed the forms that CBP, ICE, and USCIS use that may collect information about family members, including the Form I-213, *Record of Deportable / Inadmissible Alien* and the Form I-870, *Record of Determination / Credible Fear Worksheet*, and compared the information about family members apprehended together that DHS components collect on each of these forms. In addition, we reviewed policy documents, training materials, and other guidance documents from CBP (including Border Patrol and OFO), ICE, and USCIS.

- From CBP, we reviewed documents, such as CBP's 2015 *National Standards on Transport, Escort, Detention, and Search* policy, about how Border Patrol and OFO agents and officers are to detain and

⁵Noncitizens issued a final order of removal after conviction for crimes that meet the definition of an "aggravated felony" in the Immigration and Nationality Act or whose prior removal order is reinstated may be placed into streamlined removal proceedings where they cannot apply for asylum. However, if they express a fear of return, they are to be screened for "reasonable fear," a screening for withholding or deferral of removal, which are more limited forms of humanitarian protection. See 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.31, 208.16.

⁶GAO, *Immigration: Actions Needed to Strengthen USCIS's Oversight and Data Quality of Credible and Reasonable Fear Screenings*, [GAO-20-250](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 19, 2020).

process family members apprehended together.⁷ We also reviewed training materials and documentation on Border Patrol and OFO's data systems that are used to process apprehensions or encounters.

- From ICE, we reviewed documents about how ICE officers are to make detention determinations for family members, such as ICE's *Juvenile and Family Residential Management Unit Field Office Juvenile Coordinator Handbook* and ICE's *Family Residential Standards*. We also reviewed documentation on ICE's data system for detained individuals.
- From USCIS, we reviewed documents about how asylum officers are to conduct credible fear screenings for family members, including USCIS's *Credible Fear Procedures Manual*. In addition, we reviewed documents and training materials about USCIS's data system that collects information about credible fear screenings.

We also reviewed DHS and HHS interagency agreements, including the April 2018 information sharing memorandum of agreement and July 2018 Joint Concept of Operations, which provide expectations for interagency information sharing and procedures for children transferred from DHS to ORR custody.⁸ We reviewed policy documents, forms, data documentation, and training materials used by CBP, ICE, and USCIS to identify how each component identified, collected, documented, and shared, if relevant, information about family members apprehended together. We used GAO's *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide* and selected practices in GAO's *Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms and Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies* to assess the extent to which there was fragmentation

⁷U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *National Standards on Transport, Escort, Detention, and Search* (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 2015).

⁸Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *Memorandum of Agreement Regarding Consultation and Information Sharing In Unaccompanied Alien Children Matters* (Apr. 13, 2018). U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health & Human Services, *Unaccompanied Alien Children Joint Concept of Operations* (July 31, 2018).

in DHS components' processes for family members apprehended together.⁹

In addition, we interviewed DHS and HHS officials. Specifically, we interviewed DHS officials from CBP, ICE, and USCIS. We interviewed CBP officials from CBP's Office of the Commissioner and Office of Chief Counsel, Border Patrol's Law Enforcement Operations Directorate and Strategic Planning and Analysis Directorate, and OFO's Admissibility and Passenger Programs office. We interviewed ICE officials from ICE's Enforcement and Removal Operations (including the Juvenile and Family Residential Management Unit, Field Operations, Alternatives to Detention, and Law Enforcement Systems and Analysis) and ICE's Office of the Principal Legal Advisor. For USCIS, we interviewed USCIS headquarters personnel from the Asylum Division, which is responsible for managing USCIS's credible and reasonable fear screening processes. From HHS, we interviewed officials from the offices of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response and ORR.

To observe agents and officers processing families, we conducted site visits at Border Patrol stations and OFO ports of entry in Arizona, California, and Texas. Further, we conducted site visits to ICE adult detention centers and family residential centers. Specifically, in the Tucson, Arizona region (July 2018), we visited Border Patrol's Tucson sector headquarters and OFO's Tucson Field Office headquarters and the Nogales port of entry. In the San Diego, California region (September 2018), we visited Border Patrol's San Diego sector headquarters and Imperial Beach station; the San Ysidro port of entry; and an ICE single adult detention facility. In the Rio Grande Valley, Texas region (October 2018), we visited CBP's Central Processing Center; Border Patrol's McAllen station; the Hidalgo and Brownsville ports of entry; and ICE's Port Isabel single adult detention facility. In the San Antonio, Texas region (February 2019), we visited ICE's San Antonio field office headquarters; an ICE single adult detention facility; South Texas Family Residential Center; and Karnes County Residential Center. During these site visits, we interviewed Border Patrol, OFO, and ICE officials, observed agents

⁹GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015); *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012); and *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration Among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005).

and officers processing families, and toured CBP and ICE facilities, among other activities.

We also conducted site visits at two of USCIS's eight asylum offices—Houston and Arlington—in April 2019.¹⁰ We selected these asylum offices based on the relatively large size of their credible and reasonable fear caseloads in fiscal year 2018—the most recent, complete data available at the time of our review. During these visits, we conducted in-person, semi-structured interviews with asylum officers, supervisory asylum officers, training officers, and asylum office management. While the views expressed in these interviews do not represent those of all Houston and Arlington asylum office officials, they provide valuable insights from stakeholders who have experience with credible and reasonable fear policies and procedures. In addition, we collected written responses from the remaining six asylum offices.

To select these locations, we reviewed CBP data on Border Patrol and OFO apprehensions along the southwest border, including family unit apprehensions, and identified specific locations that saw the greatest increase in the number of apprehensions of individuals from fiscal year 2016 to 2017. We also considered the geographic proximity of multiple CBP and ICE facilities to maximize observations. We selected two ICE family residential centers for field visits to examine unique aspects of ICE and USCIS processing of credible and reasonable fear claims made by members of family units. During these visits to USCIS asylum offices and ICE detention facilities, we observed USCIS asylum officers conducting credible or reasonable fear screenings of single adults and family unit members either in person or via telephone. In total, we observed more than 20 credible and reasonable fear interviews across our site visits. Our observations during site visits are not generalizable to all Border Patrol, OFO, and ICE operations along the southwest border, but provided us the opportunity to learn more about how policies and procedures for processing families are implemented and how CBP, ICE, and USCIS coordinate their efforts.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2018 to February 2020 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our

¹⁰The Arlington asylum office and the Arlington Pre-Screening Center are collocated. The Arlington Pre-Screening Center provides additional support for the credible and reasonable fear caseloads.

findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Key Terms and Definitions

There are various statutes, regulations, and agency policies that set forth how DHS components are to make decisions about, or process, the family members they encounter. For the purposes of this report, we use the following key terms and definitions.

Family. Federal immigration law does not specifically define the term “family” for the purposes of identifying family relationships that are to be documented at apprehension.¹¹ DHS components and other federal agencies use the term “family” for individuals with a variety of relationships such as step-, half-, foster, or adoptive family members. Some family relationships, including parent-child, may be claimed upon apprehension, but CBP may determine that the relationship is invalid. For example, CBP may determine that (1) those claiming a familial relationship are not related or (2) their relationship does not meet the relevant component or agency’s operational definition of family.¹² For the purposes of this report, “family” refers generally to noncitizens with claimed familial relationships.

Unaccompanied alien child (UAC). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 defines a UAC as a child under the age of 18, who has no lawful immigration status in the United States and who has no parent or legal

¹¹The Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended, makes up the bulk of federal immigration law, and is largely codified in title 8 of the United States code.

¹²As we reported in February 2020, relationships between some family unit members that CBP determined were potentially invalid at the time of apprehension were later found to be valid. GAO, *Southwest Border: Actions Needed to Improve DHS Processing of Families and Coordination between DHS and HHS*, [GAO-20-245](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 19, 2020).

guardian present in the United States, or if present, no parent or legal guardian available to provide care and physical custody for that child.¹³

Family unit. Federal immigration law does not specifically define the term “family unit.” However, CBP and ICE policy and guidance documents generally define a family unit as the inverse of a UAC. In other words, a family unit includes a noncitizen child under the age of 18, who has no lawful immigration status in the United States, accompanied by a noncitizen parent or legal guardian who is able to provide care and physical custody.¹⁴ For the purposes of this report, “family unit” refers to this specific subset of family, as previously defined.¹⁵

Dependent. For a number of immigration benefit applications, including asylum, a spouse or child may be included as dependents on a principal’s application and derive lawful immigration status from the principal applicant if the applicant is granted relief. Similarly, consistent with regulation, USCIS policy is to include a spouse or child in a principal applicant’s positive credible fear determination if they arrived concurrently

¹³6 U.S.C. § 279(g)(2).

¹⁴In June 2018, the President issued an executive order that, among other things, stated that the policy of the administration is to maintain family unity, including by detaining alien families together where appropriate. The order defined an alien family as a noncitizen parent who entered the United States with their noncitizen child under age 18, consistent with the existing CBP and ICE definition. See Exec. Order No. 13841, 83 Fed. Reg. 29,435 (June 25, 2018). Additionally, on June 26, 2018, a federal judge ruled in the *Ms. L. v. ICE* case that certain separated parents must be reunited with their minor children. This case was originally filed by an individual plaintiff and then amended to a class action (class referring to individuals with a shared legal claim who are covered by the law suit). See *Ms. L. v. U.S. Immigration & Customs Enforcement (Ms. L. v. ICE)*, No. 18-0428 (S.D. Cal. March 9, 2018) (amended complaint). Specifically, the class includes “all adult parents who entered the United States at or between designated ports of entry on or after July 1, 2017 who (1) have been, are, or will be detained in immigration custody by the DHS, and (2) have a minor child who is or will be separated from them by DHS and detained in ORR custody, ORR foster care, or DHS custody, absent a determination that the parent is unfit or presents a danger to the child.” The court noted in the class certification order that “the class does not include migrant parents with criminal history or communicable disease, or those who are in the interior of the United States or subject to the June 25, 2018 Executive Order. *Ms. L. v. ICE*, No. 18-0428 (S.D. Cal. March 8, 2019) (order granting plaintiffs’ motion to modify class definition); and order granting in part and denying in part plaintiffs’ motion to enforce preliminary injunction on January 13, 2020. As of February 2020, this litigation was ongoing.

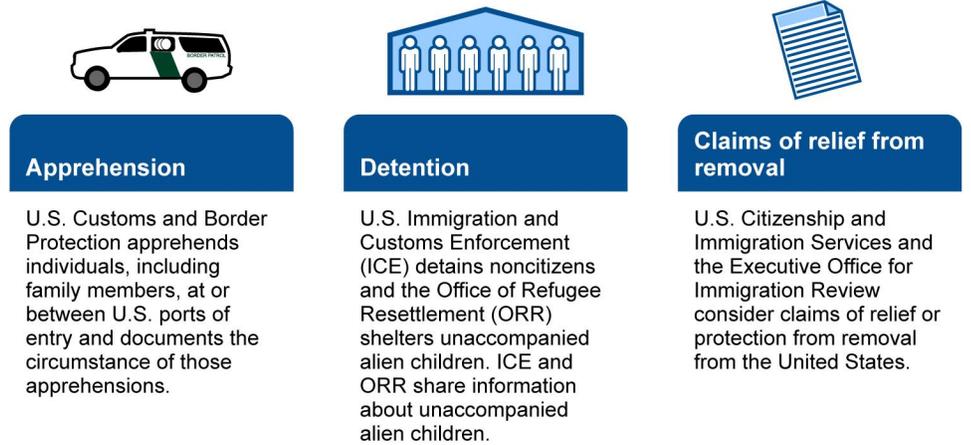
¹⁵CBP and ICE guidance states that agents are to process parents who are under age 18 apprehended with their children as UAC.

and the spouse or child wants to be included.¹⁶ In this context, “child” is generally defined in federal immigration law as an unmarried biological or legally adopted child under age 21. For the purposes of this report, we refer to principal applicants’ spouses and unmarried children under age 21 as “dependents.”

Federal Agencies’ Roles and Responsibilities

Family members who are apprehended together may encounter multiple federal agencies and components during their immigration proceedings, including DHS components, HHS’s ORR, and the Department of Justice’s Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), as shown in figure 1.¹⁷

Figure 1: Federal Agencies’ Roles and Responsibilities in Processing Apprehended Family Members



Source: GAO. | GAO-20-274

Note: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, ICE, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services are part of the Department of Homeland Security. ORR is part of the Department of Health and Human Services. The Executive Office for Immigration Review is part of the Department of Justice.

¹⁶See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101(b)(1), 1158(b)(3); see also 8 C.F.R. § 208.30 (allowing dependents, specifically a spouse or child, of a noncitizen who is deemed the principal applicant to be included in the principal applicant’s credible fear evaluation and determination if the dependent (1) arrived in the United States concurrently with the principal applicant and (2) desires to be included in the principal applicant’s credible fear determination). In addition to affirmatively applying for asylum with USCIS, if an individual is placed into removal proceedings before an immigration judge, they may submit their asylum application to the immigration court for adjudication.

¹⁷For more information about DHS’s processing of family units, see [GAO-20-245](#).

CBP documents the circumstances of noncitizens' apprehension.

After Border Patrol agents or OFO officers apprehend noncitizens, including families, they are to interview each individual, using interpreters if needed, and collect personal information such as their names, countries of nationality, and age.¹⁸ Agents and officers also collect biometric information, such as photographs and fingerprints, from certain individuals.¹⁹ Border Patrol agents and OFO officers use fingerprints to run records checks against federal government databases to determine if individuals have any previous immigration or criminal history. Agents and officers are to enter information about the individuals in the appropriate automated data system as soon as possible, in accordance with CBP policy. Border Patrol agents and OFO officers print copies of the information they enter into their data systems to create a paper file, known as an "A-file," for each noncitizen they apprehend. One of the key required DHS forms in the A-file is Form I-213, *Record of Deportable/Inadmissible Alien*. Among other things, this form captures biographic information and includes a narrative section for agents and officers to document the circumstances of the apprehension.

According to CBP policy, Border Patrol agents and OFO officers are to determine the validity of family relationships among individuals they apprehend. To do so, for example, they are to review any available documentation, such as birth certificates; monitor interactions between adults and children; and use their law enforcement training, such as interview skills, to help assess the validity of family relationships. After making decisions about the validity of familial relationships, agents and officers are to decide whether and how family members will be detained together while in CBP custody. According to CBP's 2015 *National Standards on Transport, Escort, Detention, and Search*, CBP "will maintain family unity to the greatest extent operationally feasible, absent

¹⁸In this report, we focus on DHS practices for noncitizen families. We have ongoing work related to the conditions and care CBP provides at the facilities where it holds family units, unaccompanied children, and single adults.

¹⁹See 8 C.F.R. § 236.5. According to Border Patrol and OFO officials and documents, CBP does not typically collect fingerprints for children under the age of 14. However, on a case by case basis, CBP may fingerprint children under age 14 in certain instances, such as when they suspect the child may be the victim of trafficking or involved in smuggling.

a legal requirement or articulable safety or security concern that requires separation.”²⁰

According to CBP officials, if individuals are determined to be ineligible for admission into the United States, agents and officers must decide how to process them, which may include placing them into full or expedited immigration removal proceedings, consistent with the Immigration and Nationality Act.²¹ In full removal proceedings, individuals have the opportunity to present evidence to an immigration judge to challenge their removal from the United States and apply for various forms of relief or protection, including asylum.²² In expedited removal proceedings, the government can order individuals removed from the United States without further hearings before an immigration judge unless they indicate an intention to apply for asylum, a fear of persecution or torture, or a fear of return to their home country.²³ Most arriving noncitizens are eligible to be placed into expedited removal proceedings, with certain exceptions,

²⁰According to CBP policy, detainees should generally not be held for longer than 72 hours in CBP hold rooms or holding facilities.

²¹See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1225(b), 1229a.

²²Individuals physically present within the United States, whether or not at a designated port of arrival, may be granted asylum if they are found to be unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of past persecution, or a well-founded fear of future persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. See 8 U.S.C. § 1158.

²³Individuals in expedited removal who express an intention to apply for asylum, a fear of persecution or torture, or a fear of return to their home country are referred to DHS’s USCIS for a credible fear screening, as appropriate. Through these screenings, asylum officers determine if these individuals have a credible fear of persecution or torture if returned to their country. If the officer determines that the individual has established a credible fear of persecution or torture, or in cases subject to the third country transit asylum bar, a reasonable fear of persecution or torture, he or she will place the individual into full removal proceedings. Individuals who receive a negative determination can request a review of their case by an immigration judge within EOIR. See 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.30, 208.31. We previously reported on the credible fear process in February 2020. See: [GAO-20-250](#).

according to Border Patrol and OFO officials.²⁴ Individuals placed in expedited removal proceedings and who express a fear of persecution or torture are generally subject to mandatory detention under the Immigration and Nationality Act pending a final determination of credible fear of persecution.²⁵ Regarding family units, in particular, Border Patrol and OFO officials stated that Border Patrol agents and OFO officers typically determine whether ICE has available detention space in one of its family residential centers before placing family units into expedited removal proceedings.

ICE and ORR detain or shelter noncitizens and share information about UAC. ICE, among other things, is responsible for detaining and removing noncitizens, including families, who are in the United States in violation of U.S. immigration law and subject to removal. ICE officers are to determine whether to detain, release, or remove such individuals based on a variety of factors, including statutory requirements, medical considerations, and the availability of detention space.²⁶ ICE detains adults over age 18 in detention facilities that are segregated by gender. For family units placed in expedited removal, ICE officers have the authority to accept or deny a CBP referral for detention in one of ICE's

²⁴With some exceptions, including UAC, noncitizens present in the United States without being admitted or paroled who are encountered by an immigration officer within 100 air miles of any U.S. international land border, and who have not established to the satisfaction of an immigration officer that they have been physically present in the United States continuously for 14 days, may be placed into expedited removal. See 69 Fed. Reg. 48,877, 48,880 (Aug. 11, 2004). DHS published a notice designating additional noncitizens as eligible for expedited removal on July 23, 2019, including eliminating the 100 air miles requirement and expanding the 14-day time frame to 2 years. See 84 Fed. Reg. 35,409 (July 23, 2019). This rulemaking was enjoined by the district court for the District of Columbia on September 27, 2019 and as of February 2020, litigation was ongoing. *Make the Road New York v. McAleenan*, No. 19-2369 (D.D.C. Sept. 27, 2019) (order granting preliminary injunction).

²⁵8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1)(B).

²⁶While DHS has broad authority to detain adult aliens, children, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, must be detained according to standards established in the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, and the 1997 *Flores v. Reno* Settlement Agreement (Flores Agreement). See Pub. L. No. 107-296, tit. IV, subtit. D, § 441, 116 Stat. 2135, 2192; Pub. L. No. 110-457, 112 Stat. 5044; Stipulated Settlement Agreement, *Flores v. Reno*, No. 85-4544 (C.D. Cal. Jan. 17, 1997). Litigation related to the Flores Agreement and a rulemaking published by DHS and HHS that would replace the agreement is ongoing and, as of February 2020, the Flores Agreement remains in effect. See *Flores v. Barr*, No. 85-4544 (C.D. Cal. Sept. 27, 2019) (order permanently enjoining the regulations entitled "Apprehension, Processing, Care, and Custody of Alien Minors and Unaccompanied Children," 84 Fed. Reg. 44,392).

family residential centers—a decision that ICE officials stated is largely dependent upon available detention space. As of October 2019, ICE operated three family residential centers, with different population characteristics in each center:

- South Texas Family Residential Center (Dilley, TX), which has a maximum capacity of 2,400 beds for female adults and their male or female children.
- Karnes County Residential Center (Karnes, TX), which has a maximum capacity of 830 beds for male adults and their male children.
- Berks County Residential Center (Leesport, PA), which has a maximum capacity of 96 beds for male or female adults and their male or female children.

When an individual is transferred from CBP to ICE custody, ICE officers are to enter information about that person in ICE’s data system.²⁷ The paper A-file is also transferred from CBP to ICE and, according to ICE officials, ICE officers generally review the A-file upon transfer to ensure that it is sufficiently complete. ICE’s data system automatically pulls some information, such as basic biographic information, from CBP’s data systems. ICE officers are to enter new information into ICE’s data system, such as the location(s) where officers detained or released the individual and the documents officers served to the individual, among other things.

If CBP or ICE officials determine that a child or children under the age of 18 and without lawful status in the United States arrived in the country without an accompanying parent or legal guardian, the child is classified as a UAC and is to be transferred to ORR custody.²⁸ Additionally, if DHS

²⁷The Enforcement Integrated Database is a shared common database repository, owned and operated by ICE, for several DHS law enforcement and homeland security applications. It is the repository for all records created, updated, and accessed by a number of software applications which capture and maintain information related to the investigation, arrest, booking, detention, and removal of persons encountered during immigration and criminal law enforcement investigations and operations conducted by ICE, USCIS, and CBP. Certain information contained in the Enforcement Integrated Database is shared across DHS components. However, components only have access to the applications and data that are relevant to their respective missions and authorities. For the purposes of this report, we describe the software applications used by each DHS component as that component’s “data system,” including in cases such as ICE and Border Patrol, whose software applications, or “data systems,” are both housed in the Enforcement Integrated Database repository.

²⁸See 8 U.S.C. § 1232(b)(3). UAC are not placed in expedited removal.

determines that a child should be separated from their accompanying parent or parents, DHS then considers the child to be a UAC and transfers him or her to the custody of ORR.²⁹ ORR provides interim care for UAC at its shelters and identifies qualified sponsors in the United States to take custody of the child while the child waits for his or her full immigration proceedings.³⁰ CBP's data systems can share some information about UAC automatically with ORR, including biographic information such as name, date of birth, and alien number; and information about related UAC, such as siblings, who were apprehended together.³¹

To assess the suitability of potential sponsors, ORR staff collects information from potential sponsors, which may include parents or other family members, to establish and identify their relationship to the child. For example, ORR screening of potential sponsors includes various background checks. According to ORR officials, they are required to attempt to contact a child's parent, regardless of the parent's location, any time they place a child with a sponsor. According to ORR officials, ORR is

²⁹For parents covered by the June 26, 2018 order, the court ruled that the government may not detain parents apart from their minor children, subject to certain exceptions. The order enjoined DHS from detaining parents covered by the order apart from their minor children "absent a determination that the parent is unfit or presents a danger to the child, or the parent affirmatively, knowingly, and voluntarily declines to be reunited with the child." Additionally, the order noted that "fitness" is an important factor in determining whether to separate parent from child and that "in the context of this case, and enforcement of criminal and immigration laws at the border, 'fitness' could include a class member's mental health, or potential criminal involvement in matters other than 'improper entry' under 8 U.S.C. § 1325(a), among other matters." *Ms. L. v. ICE*, No. 18-0428 (S.D. Cal. June 26, 2018) (order granting preliminary injunction); see also orders certifying and amending the class certification on June 26, 2018 and March 8, 2019 (recognizing exclusions from the class for "migrant parents with criminal history or communicable disease, or those who are in the interior of the United States or subject to [Executive Order 13841]); and order granting in part and denying in part plaintiffs' motion to enforce preliminary injunction on January 13, 2020. As of February 2020, this litigation is ongoing.

³⁰Qualified sponsors are adults—usually parents or other relatives in the country—who are suitable to provide for the child's physical and mental well-being and have not engaged in any activity that would indicate a potential risk to the child. Release to a sponsor does not grant UAC legal immigration status; rather, UAC live with their sponsors in the United States as they await their immigration court proceedings, which will determine if they will be removed from the United States or granted immigration relief.

³¹An alien number is a unique number assigned to a noncitizen by DHS. As of October 2019, Border Patrol's data system allows agents to automatically share some information with ORR's data system. OFO's data system does not allow agents to automatically share information with ORR's data system. There are key officials at Border Patrol, OFO, and ICE who have access to directly enter information into ORR's data system.

also responsible for coordinating reunification of separated family units if DHS and HHS determine it is appropriate, or if the adult is later determined by a federal court to be a class member in the ongoing *Ms. L v. ICE* litigation, related to family separations.³² ORR officials said that they rely on ICE to gather additional information, such as detailed information from an adult or UAC's Form I-213, when that information is not available or shared at the time a UAC is transferred to ORR custody.

USCIS and EOIR consider claims of relief from removal from the United States. USCIS screens individuals in expedited removal—most of whom are in ICE detention facilities—for credible fear if they indicate an intention to apply for asylum, a fear of persecution or torture, or a fear of returning to their home country.³³ In this screening, an asylum officer is to review certain documentation from CBP and ICE; perform background checks using various automated databases; interview the individual to obtain more details on his or her fear claim, overall credibility, and the nature of any relationships with family members with whom he or she was apprehended; and determine whether there are any dependents who could potentially be included in the individual's fear determination. The regulation governing the credible fear process allows dependents—specifically a spouse or unmarried child under the age of 21—of a principal applicant to be included in the applicant's credible fear determination, if the dependent (1) arrived in the United States concurrently with the principal applicant and (2) desires to be included in the principal applicant's determination.³⁴

For cases in which USCIS concludes the screening with a positive determination, USCIS is to issue a Notice to Appear, thereby placing the

³²See generally *Ms. L v. ICE*, No. 18-0428 (S.D. Cal. amended complaint filed March 9, 2018).

³³See generally 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1)(B)(iii); 8 C.F.R. §§ 208.30, 1208.30. In addition to conducting credible fear screenings, USCIS is, among other responsibilities, also responsible for adjudicating affirmative asylum applications—that is, claims made at the initiative of the individual who files an application for asylum with USCIS. See appendix II in [GAO-20-250](#) for additional information about eligibility and screening standards for credible and reasonable fear.

³⁴8 C.F.R. § 208.30(b).

individual into full removal proceedings before an immigration judge.³⁵ Consistent with regulation, if a principal applicant receives a positive credible fear determination, it is USCIS policy that his or her dependents may be included in the positive determination—and be placed into full removal proceedings—if the dependent arrived concurrently with the principal applicant and wants to be included in the principal’s credible fear determination. For cases in which the asylum officer concludes the screening with a negative determination, USCIS is to refer the individual to ICE for removal from the United States, unless he or she requests a review of the negative determination by an immigration judge. Those in full removal proceedings who apply for asylum before an immigration judge may include a spouse and/or unmarried children under age 21 in their asylum application.³⁶ If the judge grants asylum to the principal applicant, his or her dependents may also be granted asylum.

Our Work on Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication of Federal Programs

In 2010, Public Law 111-139 included a provision for us to identify and report annually on programs, agencies, offices, and initiatives—either within departments or government-wide—with duplicative goals and activities.³⁷ In our annual reports to Congress from 2011 through 2019 in fulfillment of this provision, we described areas in which we found evidence of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication among federal programs, including those managed by DHS.³⁸ To supplement these

³⁵USCIS refugee officers and former USCIS asylum officers who currently work in other divisions of the agency on detail to the asylum office also conduct credible fear reviews at ICE’s family residential centers. According to USCIS officials, all detailees receive credible fear training from USCIS and are supervised by a supervisory asylum officer who has substantial experience adjudicating asylum applications. In September 2019, Border Patrol agents on assignment to USCIS began conducting credible fear reviews, including at ICE’s family residential center in Dilley, Texas. Border Patrol agents conducting credible fear reviews are to receive credible fear training from USCIS and are to be supervised by a supervisory asylum officer who has substantial experience adjudicating asylum applications in order to satisfy the statutory definition of an asylum officer. See 8 U.S.C. § 1225(b)(1)(E).

³⁶See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1158(a)(3); 1101(b)(1).

³⁷Pub. L. No. 111-139, tit. II, § 21, 124 Stat. 8, 29-30 (2010) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 712 note).

³⁸See GAO’s Duplication and Cost Savings webpage for links to the annual reports from 2011 through 2019 and related testimonies: <https://www.gao.gov/duplication/overview>.

reports, we developed a guide to identify options to reduce or better manage the negative effects of fragmentation, overlap, and duplication, and evaluate the potential trade-offs and unintended consequences of these options.³⁹ In this report, we use the following definitions:

- Fragmentation occurs when more than one agency (or more than one organization within an agency) is involved in the same broad area of national interest and opportunities exist to improve service delivery.
- Overlap occurs when multiple programs have similar goals, engage in similar activities or strategies to achieve those goals, or target similar beneficiaries. Overlap may result from statutory or other limitations beyond the agency's control.
- Duplication occurs when two or more agencies or programs are engaged in the same activities or provide the same services to the same beneficiaries.

DHS's Processes to Identify, Collect, Document, and Share Information about Apprehended Family Members Are Fragmented

DHS Has Not Identified the Information about Family Members Apprehended at the Border That Its Components Collectively Need

DHS has not identified the information about family members apprehended together that its components collectively need or communicated that information to relevant components across the department. Based on our analysis of agency documentation and interviews with agency officials, we determined that CBP, USCIS, and ICE require different information about family members who are apprehended together and each component collects such information that is relevant to its respective operational needs. Specifically, CBP, as the apprehending agency at the border, needs information about family members apprehended together for the purposes of, among other things, informing how family members are to be detained while in CBP custody.

³⁹GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015).

In addition, USCIS needs information on family members to identify individuals who may be eligible dependents for credible fear screening purposes. ICE needs information on family members to assist USCIS in identifying eligible dependents and to assist ORR in identifying individuals who may be eligible sponsors for UAC based on their family relationship.

While each DHS component has identified the information needed to meet its own specific requirements regarding family members, DHS has not identified information needs regarding family members across its components, resulting in a lack of shared understanding of all components' needs and fragmented information collection. For example, the information that CBP collects about family members is not aligned with the information that other components, or agencies that might subsequently encounter these family members, need to identify eligible dependents for credible fear purposes or suitable sponsors for UAC.

CBP. Regarding family units, CBP (including Border Patrol and OFO) generally collects information about members of family units—including parents and their children under age 18—who are apprehended together. CBP components assign a unique identifier to a family unit that allows members' records to be linked. CBP components use the information they collect about members of family units to inform how they are to be detained while in CBP custody and to determine how their immigration proceedings are to proceed. In addition, CBP may collect information about certain other relationships among family members apprehended together because CBP and its components—Border Patrol and OFO—have policies that allow certain family members who are not defined as family units to be detained together while in CBP custody. For example, with regard to Border Patrol, family groups composed exclusively of children under the age of 18—such as siblings or a parent under age 18 and his or her child—may be held together in CBP custody, according to Border Patrol guidance. As another example, family members who Border Patrol or OFO agents or officers determine need to be detained together, such as a parent and their child over age 18 with significant medical needs, may also be held together in CBP custody.

Border Patrol and OFO have developed processes to collect information about the relationships between family members who are to be detained together, including Border Patrol assigning them a “family group” number in Border Patrol’s data system and OFO documenting the relationship between a juvenile accompanied by a non-parent family member, to facilitate their detention together while in CBP custody. However, CBP generally does not collect information about certain family members—

such as spouses or children age 18 to 21—because CBP does not have a need to collect such information if, for example, those family members will not be detained together. Other components may require this information, as described below.

USCIS. USCIS requires information about family members for credible fear screening and asylum eligibility purposes, consistent with immigration law. Based on our analysis of agency documentation and interviews with agency officials, this differs from the information that CBP collects about family members for its operational purposes. Specifically, spouses and unmarried children under age 21 may be included in their spouse or parent’s credible fear screening if the family members arrived in the United States together.⁴⁰ At the credible fear screening interview, USCIS is to document the name, country of nationality, and alien number, if known, for the spouse and name, date of birth, country of nationality, and alien number, if known, for the child or children of all individuals being screened for credible fear.

In addition, consistent with regulation, it is USCIS policy to include any dependents who arrived concurrently with the principal applicant, such as a spouse or unmarried child under the age 21, on a principal applicant’s positive credible fear determination if the dependent wants to be included. This results in both the principal applicant and any dependents being issued a Notice to Appear for full removal proceedings. In addition, USCIS’s training on screening families for credible fear states that families do not need to be detained together to be included in a positive determination.⁴¹

In other words, a principal applicant in a credible fear screening may be detained at one of ICE’s family residential centers and his or her dependent spouse or child between the ages of 18 and 21 may be detained separately at an adult detention facility. Specifically, since ICE’s adult detention facilities are segregated by gender, a female might be detained in a separate adult detention facility from her male spouse. If a parent or spouse receives a positive credible fear screening, his or her

⁴⁰8 C.F.R. § 208.30. Additionally, those in full removal proceedings who apply for asylum before an immigration judge may include a spouse and/or unmarried children under age 21 in their asylum application. See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101(b)(1), 1158(b)(3).

⁴¹U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Asylum Division / Operations, *Credible Fear Family Processing Procedures* (Washington, D.C.: updated Apr. 2, 2018).

dependent's case could be linked and both family members could receive a notice to appear in immigration court for full immigration proceedings.

According to USCIS headquarters officials, USCIS relies on information obtained during the credible fear screening interview to identify family members because the information that USCIS receives from CBP about the circumstances of an apprehension generally does not include details about spouses or children age 18-21. Further, USCIS officials said that family members over age 18 who are apprehended together may be detained in separate ICE facilities and referred to USCIS for fear screenings at different times, which makes it difficult for USCIS and ICE to locate such family members. In addition, USCIS officials said that ICE is often not aware of the family relationship between family members if they are detained separately. Specifically, although ICE is responsible for detaining noncitizens who express fear of returning to their home country before they are screened for such fear by USCIS, ICE officials responsible for detention management told us that (1) they are often not aware of family relationships between family members detained separately and (2) they treat anyone over age 18 as an adult and do not consider that a child age 18 to 21 or a spouse could be a dependent on a credible fear claim.

ICE. In addition to assisting USCIS in identifying eligible dependents for credible fear screening purposes, ICE assists ORR in identifying qualified sponsors for UAC. According to ORR, qualified sponsors include, among others, and in order of preference: parent or legal guardian; an immediate relative who previously served as a primary caretaker of the child; an immediate relative who did not previously serve as a primary caretaker of the child; and other distant relatives or unrelated adults with a pre-established relationship with the child. When a child apprehended by CBP is classified as a UAC and transferred to ORR's custody, CBP is to provide ORR with information about family members with whom the UAC was apprehended. However, officials from ORR told us that they sometimes receive UAC referrals—either through an automated system or via email—from CBP with no information about family members with whom the child was apprehended, but subsequently learn from the child that the child was apprehended with a family member.

According to ICE and ORR officials, when ORR has questions about potential sponsors for a child in their care, they coordinate with officials from ICE's juvenile and family management program to obtain additional information about the circumstances of the child's apprehension or family members with whom a child was traveling. ICE officials stated that CBP

generally provides the information on family members traveling with UAC to ORR, if CBP is aware of such information; however, according to ICE officials, children may not share all relevant details about their family members with CBP agents and officers when they are apprehended, and they may be more comfortable sharing such details once they are in ORR custody. ICE officials said that they can search their data systems, including law enforcement records, for information about the circumstances of a child's apprehension, which ORR uses when evaluating potential sponsors for the child. ORR cannot access such law enforcement records. For example, ICE can use Border Patrol's "event" unique identifier to search for information about adults who Border Patrol apprehended at the same time as a child, and can use this information to attempt to identify if there are family relationships between an adult and unaccompanied child. ORR officials said that the lack of family member information they receive from CBP or ICE, or delays in receiving such information, can delay the release of a child from a shelter to a qualified sponsor.

Our previous work on collaboration has shown that establishing compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries can enhance and sustain collaborative efforts and help ensure that fragmented efforts are being managed effectively.⁴² Further, leading practices of high-performing organizations include fostering collaboration both within and across organizational boundaries to achieve results. Moreover, federal programs contributing to the same or similar results should collaborate to ensure that program efforts are mutually reinforcing, and should clarify roles and responsibilities for their joint and individual efforts.⁴³ Our interviews and analysis indicate that the information each DHS component collects about family members meets its own information needs, but does not consider the information needs of other components that might encounter those family members. Officials from CBP and ICE confirmed that they collect information about family members to meet their own operational needs. For example, CBP may not collect information about spouses apprehended together because CBP does not need such information for its operational purposes. Further, Border Patrol and OFO officials we spoke with told us that CBP components collect all relevant information needed for their operational purposes but that CBP is not responsible for collecting information that USCIS needs to identify eligible dependents, including spouses and

⁴²[GAO-15-49SP](#).

⁴³[GAO-12-1022](#), [GAO-06-15](#).

children age 18 to 21. Without identifying and communicating department-wide information needs with respect to family members who have been apprehended together, DHS does not have reasonable assurance that its components are identifying all individuals who may be eligible for relief from removal from the United States based on their family relationships or that ICE can provide ORR with the information it needs to help evaluate the suitability of potential sponsors for UAC.

CBP Does Not Routinely Collect and Document Sufficient Information on Apprehended Family Members to Assist Other Agencies' Decision-making

CBP's Border Patrol and OFO document the circumstances under which family members are apprehended at or between U.S. ports of entry and, as a result, are in the best position to collect information about their family relationships. However, our analysis of DHS documentation and interviews with officials indicate that CBP does not routinely collect all of the information about family members that is needed to (1) identify eligible dependents as part of the credible fear screening process and (2) evaluate family members for sponsorship placement for UAC. Further, Border Patrol agents and OFO officers do not routinely document that information on the record of apprehension.

CBP's Border Patrol agents and OFO officers are to document the circumstances of an apprehension using the required Form I-213, *Record of Deportable/ Inadmissible Alien* (record of apprehension). The record of apprehension is a key form in the paper A-file and is the official record of an apprehension. Among other things, the record of apprehension captures biographic information about the apprehended individual and includes a narrative section for agents and officers to document details about the circumstances of the apprehension. Border Patrol and OFO's guidance indicates that the record of apprehension may be used as evidence in immigration or criminal courts and that omissions or mistakes on the form may have negative consequences. According to Border Patrol officials, the information captured on the record of apprehension varies and there is no requirement that it include information about family members apprehended together. However, USCIS, ICE, and ORR officials told us that they rely on the record of apprehension for such family information. As discussed below, since CBP does not routinely collect sufficient information about family members apprehended together or document such information on the record of apprehension, there are

gaps in the information available to other DHS components about family members apprehended together.

Information to identify eligible dependents as part of the credible fear screening process. CBP does not routinely collect sufficient information about relationships between family members apprehended together for USCIS and ICE to later identify if such individuals are eligible dependents as part of the credible fear screening process. As previously discussed, consistent with regulation, it is USCIS policy to include any dependents on a principal applicant's positive credible fear determination if the dependents arrived concurrently with the principal applicant and want to be included on the principal applicant's credible fear determination. However, CBP does not routinely collect information about relationships between all parents, children, and spouses apprehended together at the time of their apprehension or share that information with USCIS. Specifically, CBP does not require its agents and officers to collect information about or to document the relationships between certain family members apprehended together, such as spouses and children age 18 to 21. As a result, USCIS's ability to identify eligible dependents is limited.

Asylum officers are to ask all individuals they screen for credible fear if they arrived in the United States with other family members. Asylum officers told us that, when CBP does not collect information about potentially eligible dependents—especially spouses and children age 18 to 21—they face challenges in identifying and locating such dependents. Asylum officers also told us that when CBP agents and officers do not collect and document information about relationships at the time family members are apprehended, asylum officers must rely on the information that the applicant provides in the credible fear screening interview, rather than using the screening interview to corroborate family information already collected by CBP at the time of the apprehension. In addition, a USCIS official told us that it can be beneficial for USCIS to have information about relationships between all parents, children, and spouses who are apprehended together for other processes—such as if one family member placed into expedited removal proceedings is subject to the reasonable fear process—because information in one family member's claim can impact other family members' ability to meet the threshold for a positive fear determination.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Unlike the regulation governing credible fear screenings, which allows certain dependents to be included in a principal applicant's determination, the regulation governing reasonable fear screenings does not provide for such a process. See 8 C.F.R. § 208.31.

Border Patrol, OFO, and ICE officials stated that, due to the volume of apprehensions at the southwest border, Border Patrol and OFO collect information to meet CBP's operational needs, but that the level of detail documented on the record of apprehension may vary. Specifically, according to one ICE official responsible for detention at a family residential center and an ICE headquarters official, information about family relationships, including that of spouses, is not consistently documented in the information ICE receives from CBP and shares with USCIS. Since USCIS does not receive consistent information about family members from CBP, USCIS officers must rely on the credible fear screening interview to identify potential eligible dependents.

When asylum officers identify eligible dependents during the credible fear screening interview, officers attempt to locate these dependents to link them to their parent's or spouse's case. However, according to USCIS and ICE officials, it can be difficult to locate such dependents if they are not detained together. Specifically, because CBP officers and agents do not routinely collect information about the relationships between spouses or parents and children age 18 to 21 or document such information on the record of apprehension at the time they are apprehended, USCIS and ICE do not have the information about those family relationships that they need to locate and identify eligible dependents. Additionally, individuals may not know certain information—such as the alien number of their spouse or child—that would help USCIS or ICE locate them. ICE officials told us that they assist USCIS officials in locating spouses and children age 18 to 21 for the purposes of making them dependents on a spouse or parent's credible fear application on a case by case basis, but that tracking down such dependents can be difficult. Further, ICE and USCIS officials told us that because they do not have sufficient information about eligible dependents, it is possible that ICE could remove an eligible dependent from the United States while their spouse or parents' credible fear claim was pending, or after their spouse or parent received a positive credible fear determination.

Information to assist ORR in making placement decisions for children transferred to its custody. CBP does not collect all information about family members at the time of apprehension that is needed to assist ORR in making placement decisions for UAC transferred to its custody, according to ICE and ORR headquarters officials. When CBP refers a child for placement at an ORR shelter, CBP is to share some information with ORR, including the name, age, and alien number of the child, as well as information about any family members with whom the

child was apprehended.⁴⁵ ORR officials stated they use this information to assist in making placement decisions for the child. However, ORR officials stated that the information CBP provides when the child is referred may not include information about family members with whom the child was apprehended. Further, according to ORR officials, they do not typically receive the child's Form I-213—which documents the circumstances of the child's apprehension—from CBP. ORR officials said that they sometimes receive UAC referrals from CBP without any information about other family members and they may subsequently learn from the child that he or she was apprehended with a family member.

Additionally, if ORR officials have questions about a child in their custody, officials from ICE's Juvenile and Family Residential Management Unit told us that they are the liaison between DHS and ORR. ICE officials told us that the level of detail that CBP agents and officers collect for UAC apprehended with family members varies. According to an ICE official in ICE's Juvenile and Family Residential Management Unit, the more information that CBP agents and officers provide about the circumstances of a child's apprehension, the better equipped ICE is to answer ORR's questions about familial relationships and potential suitable sponsors for a particular child, as well as to investigate potentially fraudulent familial relationships or circumstances in which an adult apprehended with a child might not be a suitable sponsor. According to ORR officials, they also rely on ICE to provide information about the suitability of reunifying a parent and child where ORR determines that a UAC was separated from their parent or legal guardian with whom they arrived.

As we reported in February 2020, DHS and HHS have developed interagency agreements for the transfer and placement of UAC between the two departments; however, information sharing gaps remain.⁴⁶ Specifically, ORR headquarters officials stated that they have experienced delays in releasing a child to a sponsor due to missing information about a parent or the inability to notify a parent in ICE detention about sponsorship decisions. We recommended that DHS and HHS should collaborate to address information sharing gaps to ensure that ORR receives information needed to make decisions for UAC,

⁴⁵According to ORR officials, Border Patrol apprehends approximately 95 percent of the UAC that are transferred to ORR custody. OFO and ICE apprehend approximately 4 and 1 percent of UAC, respectively, who are transferred to ORR custody.

⁴⁶[GAO-20-245](#).

including those apprehended with an adult. DHS and HHS concurred with the recommendations.

Border Patrol and OFO developed their own requirements for what information they collect, if any, about family members apprehended together based on their operational needs. However, because CBP agents and officers collect information and document the circumstances of apprehensions when families first arrive in the United States, they are best positioned to identify those family members who were apprehended together and the relationships among them. Additionally, the information that CBP agents and officers collect may impact how family members are subsequently identified or processed by other federal agencies.

CBP officials said that their components collect limited information about family members apprehended together because they do not have an operational need for such information and because collecting it is time intensive in an environment where agents and officers are managing a large volume of apprehensions. However, because CBP does not routinely collect sufficient information about family relationships at the time of apprehension, or document that information on the record of apprehension, DHS components do not have information necessary to identify potentially eligible dependents for credible fear purposes and ICE does not have sufficient information to assist ORR in making suitable sponsorship determinations. Further, while we recognize that the collection of additional information on family members can be time intensive for CBP, as the apprehending agency, CBP is best positioned to collect and document information on family members apprehended together. In addition, ICE, USCIS, and ORR may expend resources themselves trying to identify family relationships for their own operational purposes.

As previously noted, our prior work on collaboration has shown that establishing compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries can enhance and sustain collaborative efforts and help ensure that fragmented efforts are being managed effectively.⁴⁷ In October 2019, CBP officials acknowledged that it could be helpful to consider other agencies' information needs when collecting information about apprehended families. Collecting information about the relationships between family members apprehended together and documenting that information on the Form I-213 could help address

⁴⁷[GAO-12-1022](#), [GAO-15-49SP](#).

fragmentation among DHS components and improve the information available to other agencies, such as ORR, to ensure that relevant information is available to support decisions on individuals' administrative immigration or other proceedings.

DHS Components' Data Systems Have Fragmented Information about Family Members

DHS does not have a mechanism to link the records of family members apprehended together across its components. Specifically, CBP's data systems can assign unique family identifiers to link records of certain family members together, as appropriate, upon apprehension. CBP uses these unique identifiers to facilitate the detention of family members together in CBP custody. They also provide a mechanism for CBP to search for and identify family members that share a unique identifier. However, those identifiers are not readily accessible and usable to USCIS and ICE, which also have operational needs to identify and review records of family members apprehended together. Further, USCIS and ICE's data systems do not assign unique family identifiers. Because DHS's data systems do not have shared family identifiers to link family members, DHS components may not have access to all the information about family members they need to make effective and efficient operational decisions.⁴⁸

CBP's data systems assign unique family identifiers. Regarding family units, CBP components have guidance on how Border Patrol agents and OFO officers are to enter information on family units in their respective data systems.⁴⁹ CBP's data systems assign a unique identifier

⁴⁸As previously stated, the Enforcement Integrated Database is a shared common database repository, owned and operated by ICE, for several DHS law enforcement and homeland security applications used by ICE, USCIS, and CBP. According to DHS, components only have access to the applications and data that are relevant to their respective missions and authorities. For the purposes of this report, we describe the software applications used by each DHS component as that component's "data system," including in cases such as ICE and Border Patrol, whose software applications, or "data systems," are both housed in the Enforcement Integrated Database repository.

⁴⁹OFO's legacy data system does not have a family unit identifier. OFO is in the process of transitioning to a new data system, which does use a family unit identifier. As of October 2019, OFO officials told us that the new data system is operational in some non-southwest border locations. OFO officials told us that they plan for the new data system to be deployed along the southwest border—and to replace the legacy data system—on an ongoing basis as conditions allow.

to each family unit and link their records, and agents and officers are to collect the following information about family units:

- Border Patrol guidance indicates that agents are to process adult parents and their children under age 18 who are apprehended together as members of a family unit, and the data system assigns each family unit a unique family unit identifier.⁵⁰ This identifier links the records of the family unit members together, and allows agents to search for family unit members using that number.
- OFO is deploying a new data system and, as of October 2019, OFO officials said that they planned for the new system to be deployed along the southwest border on an ongoing basis as conditions allow. OFO documentation on the new system indicates, and OFO officials told us, that the new system will allow OFO officers to assign a unique family identifier to members of a family unit and will allow officers to document the familial relationship between members of family units.

Border Patrol's data system can also assign a unique family group identifier to family members whom agents determine should be detained together for Border Patrol's operational purposes. According to Border Patrol guidance and officials, family group numbers may be used to link family members during Border Patrol detention. Further, these numbers may be documented on the record of apprehension and may be shared with ORR to, for example, link the records of two related UAC when Border Patrol transfers them to ORR custody. However, Border Patrol agents have discretion to determine whether family members apprehended together are to be assigned a unique family group identifier, according to agency documentation and our interviews with agency officials. CBP components do not have a mechanism to share their unique family unit or family group identifiers with ICE or USCIS in a way that is readily accessible and usable.

CBP's data systems share limited information on apprehended family members with ICE's data system. When ICE receives custody of a family unit from CBP, ICE officers create a record for each family

⁵⁰According to Border Patrol's *e3 Processing Guide*, all family units must have at least one adult. The guide states, for example, that a 16-year-old mother traveling with her two-month-old baby is to be processed as a family group because, since the 16-year-old mother is not an adult, they do not meet ICE's definition of a family unit.

member in ICE's data system.⁵¹ ICE's data system pulls some information about each family member automatically from CBP's data systems.⁵² For example, ICE officers can find basic biographic information about individual family members apprehended by Border Patrol by searching using the individual's alien number, a DHS unique identifier assigned to individuals. In addition, ICE identified a need for more information to help identify family units in ICE custody and developed a mechanism to receive that information from CBP. As of August 2018, ICE's data system displays a family unit "banner" in the data records of those noncitizens CBP processed as a member of a family unit. This banner flags for ICE officers that the individual was identified by CBP as a family unit member, and ICE's data system displays the Border Patrol or OFO unique family unit identifier.

ICE's family unit banner was a positive development and allows ICE to identify individuals in its custody that CBP processed as a member of a family unit. However, the family unit banner does not provide ICE all the information it needs to identify family members, according to ICE officials. Specifically, ICE can see that a particular individual was processed by CBP as a member of a family unit, but ICE cannot use the system to identify other members of that person's family because ICE's data system does not link or display alien numbers for individuals who share a family unit identifier. According to Border Patrol officials, because ICE and Border Patrol's data systems are both housed within ICE's Enforcement Integrated Database repository, ICE should have access to the family unit information collected by Border Patrol. However, ICE officials stated that ICE cannot use the information on family units that CBP's data system shares with ICE's data system to, for example, search for family unit members using Border Patrol's unique family unit identifier. According to ICE officials, ICE officers must use a time consuming and manual

⁵¹Although CBP and ICE's data systems are both housed in ICE's Enforcement Integrated Database repository, each component has its own software applications within the repository. These software applications allow each component to capture, view, and share data that officials have determined is relevant to the components' needs.

⁵²OFO's legacy data system does not share information about family relationships automatically with ICE's data system. As of October 2019, OFO is in the process of transitioning to a new data system, which does use a family unit identifier and can share information about family unit member relationships with ICE's data system. As previously stated, as of October 2019, OFO officials told us that they plan for the new data system to be deployed along the southwest border—and to replace the legacy data system—on an ongoing basis as conditions allow.

process to research potential family associations or identify family unit members using the information CBP provides to ICE.

Further, ICE's data system cannot link the records of family unit members in its custody, although these family unit members are generally detained together in one of ICE's family residential centers. According to ICE guidance and ICE officials, ICE's data system only displays family unit information as entered by CBP and such information is not available for individuals identified as members of a family unit after entering ICE custody.⁵³ As of November 2019, ICE headquarters officials stated that they are working with the ICE data unit to create a new module that would enhance ICE's ability to link and track family units in its data system, including expanding ICE's use of existing family unit information as entered by CBP. According to ICE officials, ICE has established a project team for this effort and hopes to deploy the updates in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020. However, ICE did not provide any documentation on this effort, such as a project plan with time frames for deploying these system updates, to verify these plans.

Although ICE has taken steps to identify individuals in its custody that CBP documented as members of a family unit, ICE does not have a mechanism to link the records of family unit members together. In addition, ICE does not have a mechanism, such as a unique family group identifier, to link the records of other family members apprehended together. ICE needs information about these other family members to (1) assist USCIS in identifying eligible dependents for credible fear screening purposes and (2) assist ORR in identifying family members with whom a UAC was apprehended and assessing whether they might be suitable sponsors. According to ICE officials, ICE uses a manual process to identify family members apprehended together. Without a mechanism, such as a shared unique identifier, that ICE can use to access information CBP gathered about family members apprehended together, ICE cannot ensure that it has the information it needs to identify eligible dependents, or to answer ORR's questions about UAC with the best available information. As of November 2019, ICE is enhancing its data system's ability to link and track family unit members. However, it is too early to know if ICE's planned system enhancements will include a mechanism

⁵³U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Enforcement and Removal Operations and Law Enforcement Systems and Analysis, *ENFORCE Alien Removal Module (EARM) Training Manual* (Washington, D.C.: Updated July 2018).

that will allow ICE officers to identify family members apprehended together.

CBP and ICE’s data systems do not share information on apprehended and detained family members with USCIS’s data system. USCIS’s data system does not receive information about family members (parents, spouses, and children) from CBP or ICE in an automated manner.⁵⁴ According to USCIS officials, because CBP’s and ICE’s data systems do not have a mechanism—such as a linked unique family identifier—to share information about potential dependents with USCIS’s data system automatically, the credible fear interview may be the only way for USCIS to determine that an individual being screened for credible fear was apprehended with other family members, especially if any members of the family are detained separately.

For family members detained separately, according to USCIS officials, USCIS asylum officers attempt to locate spouses and children age 18 to 21 when they are made aware of such family relationships as part of the credible fear screening process. However, due to limitations in data sharing between CBP, ICE, and USCIS, USCIS may not be able to locate such spouses and children age 18 to 21 in some circumstances. In particular, USCIS officials told us that, if the spouse or child did not make his or her own claim of credible fear while in CBP or ICE custody, USCIS asylum officers use a time consuming and manual process to attempt to identify family members apprehended together, using data that ICE makes available to USCIS. ICE officials told us that they assist USCIS officials in locating spouses and children age 18 to 21 for the purposes of making them dependents on a spouse or parent’s credible fear application on a case by case basis, but that tracking down such dependents can be difficult.

USCIS has developed a mechanism to link family members in its own data system, but this linkage is for USCIS’s purposes and is unrelated to the unique family unit or family group identifier assigned by CBP components at the time family members are apprehended or to the “family unit” banner that ICE’s data system displays for certain family

⁵⁴According to ICE officials, ICE’s data system shares approximately 30 unique data fields with USCIS’s data system on a daily basis. However, according to USCIS officials, these shared fields do not include information that would allow USCIS to easily identify family members who were apprehended together.

units.⁵⁵ Additionally, USCIS’s data system does not assign a unique identifier to family members whose cases are linked for credible fear screening purposes and USCIS does not have access to CBP’s family identifiers. A shared family member unique identifier could allow USCIS, CBP, and ICE access to more complete information about family members who were apprehended together and could give USCIS and ICE, in particular, greater assurance that they have complete information about family members apprehended together that they require for their operational needs.

Our previous work on collaboration has shown that identifying and addressing needs by leveraging resources, such as information technology resources, can enhance and sustain collaborative efforts, and help ensure that fragmented efforts are being managed effectively.⁵⁶ Border Patrol, OFO, ICE, and USCIS data systems were developed to meet each component’s operational needs, leading to (1) data system integration limitations and (2) variation in the type of information that each component collects or requires. Components have implemented ways to share some information across their data systems—such as ICE’s “family unit” banner for members of family units processed by Border Patrol and USCIS’s ability to access some information in ICE’s data system to attempt to identify eligible dependents of individuals who have received a positive credible fear determination—but such information sharing is limited, and the components do not have a unique shared identifier to identify family members apprehended together. Moreover, DHS and its components have not considered options to share information on family members across components in an automated manner, as each component has been focused on its own operational needs for such information.

Evaluating options for developing a shared unique family member identifier across CBP, ICE, and USCIS that would allow each component access to certain information about family members apprehended together would help bridge the information gaps about family relationships between components caused by DHS’s fragmented data systems. Further, it would give DHS greater assurance that its components can

⁵⁵According to the USCIS data system’s user guide, immediate family members are the spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age who arrive in the United States concurrently with the principal applicant. According to USCIS officials, USCIS’s data system documents the relationship between linked family members—such as self, sibling, or child—but does not assign a unique family identifier to cases that are linked.

⁵⁶[GAO-12-1022](#), [GAO-15-49SP](#).

identify family members who were apprehended together, even after they leave CBP custody. It would also mitigate the risk that, lacking such information, DHS could remove individuals from the United States who may have been eligible for relief based on their family relationship.

Conclusions

Although CBP's apprehensions of family members have increased significantly in recent years, DHS has not taken steps to better manage fragmentation, including identifying, collecting, documenting, and sharing the information its components collectively need about family members apprehended together. The information each DHS component collects about family members apprehended together meets its own information needs. However, it does not consider the information needs of other components that might encounter those family members. Border Patrol and OFO officials we spoke with told us that CBP components collect all relevant information needed for their operational purposes but that CBP is not responsible for collecting information that USCIS needs to identify eligible dependents, including spouses and children age 18 to 21. Without identifying information needs with respect to family members who have been apprehended together—and without communicating that information department-wide to relevant components—DHS does not have reasonable assurance that its components are identifying all individuals who may be eligible for relief from removal from the United States based on their family relationships.

In addition, as the component that apprehends individuals arriving at the border, CBP is best positioned to document the circumstances of an apprehension, including by collecting and documenting information about family members who arrive in the United States together. Collecting information about the relationships between family members apprehended together and documenting that information on the Form I-213, the record of apprehension, would improve management of fragmentation among DHS components and improve the information available to other agencies, such as ORR, to ensure that relevant information is available to support decisions on individuals' administrative immigration or other proceedings.

Lastly, DHS components' data systems were developed to meet each component's operational needs, leading to data system integration limitations and variation in the type of information that each component collects or requires. Components have implemented ways to share some information across their data systems, but such information sharing is limited. Evaluating options for developing a shared unique family member identifier across CBP, ICE, and USCIS that would allow each component access to certain information about family members apprehended

together would help bridge the information gaps about family relationships between components caused by DHS's fragmented data systems.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following four recommendations to DHS:

The Secretary of Homeland Security should identify the information about family members apprehended together that its components collectively need to process those family members and communicate that information to its components. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure that, at the time of apprehension, CBP collects the information that DHS components collectively need to process family members apprehended together. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure that CBP documents the information that DHS components collectively need to process family members apprehended together on the Form I-213. (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of Homeland Security should evaluate options for developing a unique identifier shared across DHS components' data systems to link family members apprehended together. (Recommendation 4)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DHS and HHS for their review and comment. DHS provided formal, written comments, which are reproduced in full in appendix I. DHS and HHS also provided technical comments on our draft report, which we incorporated, as appropriate.

DHS concurred with our recommendations and described actions planned or underway to address them. For example, in response to our recommendation that DHS identify the information its components need about family members apprehended together, DHS stated that the DHS Office of Immigration Statistics within the DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans will work with CBP, ICE, USCIS, and interagency partners to establish a comprehensive set of information to collect on family

members apprehended at the border. Further, in response to our recommendations that DHS collect and document the information its components collectively need about family members apprehended at the border, DHS stated that after DHS identifies the information about families apprehended together that its components collectively need, CBP will work with DHS's policy office to ensure all required information is collected at the time of apprehension on the Form I-213. In addition, Border Patrol and OFO will issue guidance to their agents and officers to ensure they document the information about family members apprehended together that DHS components collectively need. Regarding our recommendation that DHS evaluate options for developing a unique identifier shared across DHS components' data systems to link family members apprehended together, DHS stated that its policy office will work with CBP, ICE, and USCIS to develop a unique shared identifier linking family members apprehended together.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the appropriate congressional committees, the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix II.



Rebecca Gambler
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

**Appendix I: Comments from the Department of
Homeland Security**

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



February 5, 2020

Rebecca Gambler
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management Response to Draft Report GAO-20-274, "SOUTHWEST BORDER:
Actions Needed to Address Fragmentation in DHS's Processes for Apprehended
Family Members"

Dear Ms. Gambler:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

DHS performs an essential role in securing our Nation's borders at and between ports of entry, and enforcing U.S. immigration law within the interior of the country. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers and agents continually uphold the utmost professionalism while performing essential border security operations. In addition, DHS is devoted to the care and processing of the individuals in our custody with the utmost dignity and respect.

DHS has taken steps to ensure an elevated standard of care in response to the current humanitarian crisis. CBP saw nearly 340 percent increase in family unit apprehensions at the Southwest Border (SWB) from fiscal year (FY) 2016 to FY 2019. In FY 2019, there were 1,148,024 enforcement actions taken by CBP primarily at the SWB: 859,501 apprehensions and 288,523 inadmissible cases. The Department is pleased with the efforts CBP has made to improve its processing and reporting capabilities of family units and unaccompanied alien children (UAC) on the SWB, while managing the humanitarian crisis. Amidst the crisis on the SWB, CBP was able to issue policies, guidance, and implement a new secondary processing system to strengthen processing and address reporting gaps identified as a result of the unprecedented migrant surge.

**Appendix I: Comments from the Department of
Homeland Security**

In addition, CBP and ICE share information with the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) regarding UAC to assist with ORR's reunification efforts. As acknowledged in the draft report, ICE and ORR headquarters coordinate on a weekly basis to share data on UAC. ICE has also added staff resources to support information sharing and respond to ORR requests.

DHS and its components remain committed to continuing collaborative efforts with major stakeholders to improve the processing of family units and collection of data, while safeguarding the American people, our homeland, and our values.

DHS concurs with the four recommendations in the draft report. Attached find our detailed response to each recommendation. Technical comments have been previously provided under a separate cover.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,



JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

**Attachment: Management Response to Recommendations
Contained in GAO-20-274**

GAO recommended that the Secretary of Homeland Security:

Recommendation 1: Identify the information about family members apprehended together that its components collectively need to process those family members and communicate that information to its components

Response: Concur. The DHS Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS), within the DHS Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans (PLCY), will work with CBP, ICE, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and the Department's interagency partners to establish a comprehensive set of data parameters to collect on family members apprehended at the border. Estimated Completion Date (ECD): September 30, 2020.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that, at the time of apprehension, CBP collects the information that DHS components collectively need to process family members apprehended together.

Response: Concur. Once DHS OIS completes the identification of information about family members apprehended together that its Components collectively need, CBP will work with PLCY to ensure all required information is collected at time of apprehension, on the Form I-213, when processing family members apprehended together. ECD: December 31, 2020.

Recommendation 3: Ensure that CBP documents the information that DHS components collectively need to process family members apprehended together on the Form I-213.

Response: Concur. Upon implementation of Recommendation 2, CBP operational offices of the U.S. Border Patrol and Field Operations, will issue guidance to the field ensuring that CBP documents the information that DHS components collectively need to process family members apprehended together on the Form I-213. ECD: March 31, 2021.

Recommendation 4: Evaluate options for developing a unique identifier shared across DHS Components' data systems to link family members apprehended together.

Response: Concur. DHS OIS will work with CBP, ICE, and USCIS to develop a unique shared identifier linking family members apprehended together. ECD: September 30, 2020.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Kathryn Bernet (Assistant Director), Mary Pitts (Analyst in Charge), Carissa Bryant, Miranda Cohen, Michael Harmond, Stephanie Heiken, Leslie Sarapu, Jessica Walker, Dominick Dale, Eric Hauswirth, Jan Montgomery, Heidi Nielson, and Michele Fejfar made key contributions to this work.

Appendix IV: Accessible Data

Agency Comment Letter

Accessible Text for Appendix I Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

Page 1

February 5, 2020

Rebecca Gambler

Director, Homeland Security and Justice

U.S. Government Accountability Office

441 G Street, NW

Washington, DC 20548

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Page 2

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Sincerely,

JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE

Director

Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

Page 3

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