June 17, 2019

The Honorable Richard Shelby  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita M. Lowey  
Chairwoman  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kay Granger  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shelby, Chairwoman Lowey, Vice Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Granger:

On behalf of the American Bar Association and our more than 400,000 members around the nation, I write to urge you to act quickly to pass supplemental appropriations to ensure the appropriate treatment and care of unaccompanied immigrant children in government custody.

As you know, the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is charged by law with the custody and care of unaccompanied alien children who have entered the United States. A recent spike in the number of children has placed a tremendous strain on ORR’s resources and the agency recently announced that it has begun to halt funding to shelters and service providers for activities not considered directly necessary for the protection of life and safety, including education services, legal services, and recreation.

This situation is especially troubling given the increasing length of time that children are in custody; according to ORR, the overall average stay is now 66 days. Some children stay months longer. It is simply unacceptable that children would be deprived of these basic services while in the care of the U.S. government.

We recognize that the large number of unaccompanied children entering the country has created difficult challenges. However, as a country that rightly prioritizes the welfare of children, in our legal system and otherwise, we must not diminish the protections in place to ensure the
appropriate treatment of unaccompanied children. We urge that you move expeditiously to pass a supplemental appropriation bill to provide the funds necessary for ORR to carry out these critical functions.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Carlson
President

cc: Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees