



Child Well-Being Professionals

Fiscal Year 2024

October 30, 2024

Fiscal Year 2024 Report to Congress



**Homeland
Security**

Office of Health Security

Message from the Acting Director of the Office of Health Security and Acting Chief Medical Officer

October 30, 2024

I am pleased to provide the following report, “Child Well-Being Professionals,” prepared by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Health Security.

The report was prepared pursuant to direction set forth in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the FY 2024 DHS Appropriations Act (P.L. 118-47).

Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable Mark Amodei
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

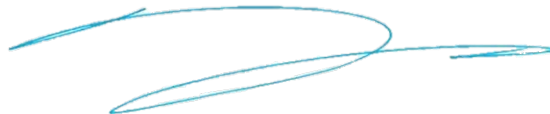
The Honorable Lauren Underwood
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Katie Britt
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Please direct inquiries to me at OHS@hq.dhs.gov.

Sincerely,



Dr. Herbert O. Wolfe
Chief Medical Officer (Acting)
Director (Acting), Office of Health Security





Child Well-Being Professionals

Table of Contents

I.	Legislative Language.....	1
II.	Background.....	2
III.	Program Development and Staffing Plan	3
IV.	Duties and Responsibilities of Professional Staff.....	5
V.	Guiding Standards and Frameworks.....	6
VII.	Appendix.....	8

I. Legislative Language

The Joint Explanatory Statement, accompanying the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 118-47).

The Joint Explanatory Statement states:

Child Well-Being Professionals.—Not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act, OHS shall provide a report to the Committees, and post a report on its website, identifying:

- 1) how many licensed child well-being professionals the Office of Health Security (OHS) has hired;
- 2) how many additional licensed child well-being professionals OHS intends to hire and on what timetable;
- 3) in which locations OHS-hired licensed child well-being professionals have been assigned or will be assigned;
- 4) how OHS is using and will use OHS-hired child well-being professionals; and
- 5) any standards guiding the work of OHS-hired licensed child well-being professionals.

II. Background

OHS is the principal medical, workforce health and safety, and public health authority for DHS. OHS strengthens the Nation's health security through leadership and partnership, a safer and healthier DHS workforce, and optimal care for individuals in DHS custody. As part of this mission, OHS trains, unifies, integrates, and standardizes quality healthcare for individuals in DHS care and custody, while ensuring appropriate oversight.

The Child Well-Being (CWB) Program was established by DHS to support the well-being of migrant children – both unaccompanied and in family units and groups – from the time of encounter by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to their transfer out of DHS custody. The CWB Program is managed by OHS, which is building and staffing the program with licensed and experienced mental health professionals to support care for children during the brief period (up to 72 hours) they are in CBP facilities. The OHS-staffed CWB Specialists will be integrated into operations within CBP, primarily at U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) facilities. These specialists will work alongside CBP Agents and Officers, as well as CBP-contracted medical services personnel and caregiver staff, to provide trauma-informed, culturally sensitive supplementary support, coordination, and subject matter expertise¹ for the well-being of children in CBP's custody.

The objective of the CWB Program is the well-being of children in CBP's custody, enabling CBP's law enforcement workforce to focus its resources and enforcement actions on those who pose a threat to our national security, border security, and public safety. As a higher-risk population in custody, specialized clinical resources such as CWB Specialists who are able to provide dedicated support and attention to the well-being of children are critical to managing a safe, orderly, and humane immigration system. It also allows law enforcement professionals to focus on activities aligned to their law enforcement training, duties, and responsibilities.

¹ In addition to core duties related to the well-being of children in custody, CWB Specialists will also support CBP training and education programming for Agents and Officers. This training and education enhances the ability of DHS law enforcement personnel to interact with children in custody, conduct effective investigations and respond to possible cases of human trafficking.

III. Program Development and Staffing Plan

OHS developed the CWB Program in close collaboration with CBP and other partners. Among those CBP components that contributed to the CWB Program development are the USBP, Office of Field Operations, CBP Operations Support (OS), and within CBP/OS, the CBP Office of the Chief Medical Officer. OHS personnel also worked closely with Border Patrol Sectors along the U.S. Southwest Border (SWB), completing 14 field visits from August 2022 to May 2024 in order to better understand the operational realities, collaborate with sector personnel, and determine how CWB Specialists can augment operations.

In addition to CBP, OHS worked with other partners across the DHS Enterprise and the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families Office of Refugee Resettlement. OHS also continues to incorporate input from non-governmental organizations and professional healthcare associations.

Staffing Plan

Once fully staffed, the CWB Program will deploy credentialed, licensed, and highly qualified clinicians to each of nine Border Patrol Sectors along the SWB, serving at processing facilities that temporarily hold unaccompanied children and families. Additionally, federal personnel in both Washington, D.C., and at various locations along the SWB will support the program and coordinate with CBP and other operational partners.

OHS rooted the design of the CWB Specialist role in the perspectives and needs of CBP, bolstered by the qualifications and experience of licensed mental health professionals and evidence-based frameworks and practices, while also aligning the role with DHS and CBP policies governing care and custody of migrants. The combination of SWB sector field visits and consistent engagement with partners at CBP helps OHS better understand the operational realities on the ground, collaborate with sector personnel, and determine how CWB Specialists can augment operations.

Based in Washington, D.C., the CWB Program Office consists of a cohort of three federal clinical and program management positions that provide the necessary planning, administrative support, and oversight of the CWB Program. OHS is also in the process of recruiting federal regional leads that will be positioned across the SWB. The initial cohort of these federal regional leads will be based in the Tucson, El Paso, Del Rio, and Rio Grande Valley (RGV) Sectors to support the program in the field, liaise with headquarters, and coordinate with CBP field leadership. In this initial deployment phase, the regional lead in the Tucson Sector will also support the Yuma, El Centro, and San Diego Sectors, and the regional lead in Del Rio Sector will also support the Big Bend and Laredo Sectors.

The bulk of the around-the-clock coverage by specialized child well-being personnel who are embedded within the SWB sectors (CWB Specialists) will be provided via a services contract. The procurement was executed in September 2024. Additional information on the procurement

is available from the DHS Office of the Chief Procurement Officer’s Office of Procurement Operations².

The contracted services provider will deploy licensed child well-being specialists to USBP facilities where children and families are processed. The initial baseline deployment is identified below:

Sector	# of CWB Specialists (24/7/365)	# of Lead (Supervisory) Specialists (24/7/365)
San Diego	1	1
El Centro	1	1
Yuma	1	1
Tucson	2	1
El Paso	2	1
Big Bend	1	1
Del Rio	2	1
Laredo	1	1
RGV	2	1

The initial baseline deployment is projected to occur in two phases:

Phase I

- All CWB Specialists and Lead Specialists assigned to the entirety of four priority sectors based on volumes of unaccompanied children encountered: Tucson, El Paso, Del Rio, and RGV.
- This phase is expected to be completed between November 2024 and February 2025.

Phase II

- All CWB Specialists and Lead Specialists assigned to the remaining five sectors.
- This phase is expected to be completed between February 2025 and April 2025.

The CWB Program will also incorporate capability to temporarily surge resources to the SWB, or other locations as required by DHS.

² Office of Procurement Operations (OPO) Industry Liaison, opoindustryliasion@hq.dhs.gov

IV. Duties and Responsibilities of Professional Staff

The CWB Specialists will support children, families, and facility partners through duties and responsibilities organized into four categories, as identified through review of evidence-based and -supported practices and validated through engagement with governmental partners, non-governmental partners, and professional medical associations. The four categories are:

1. ***Technical assistance to facility partners.*** Provide subject matter expertise, using a collaborative approach, to enhance the existing child welfare system and improve health and behavioral outcomes for children. This includes:
 - Education, care recommendations, and case coordination support.
 - Supporting mental and behavioral health and psychosocial well-being of children.
2. ***Direct support to children and families.*** This includes:
 - Brief Assessment: Understand a child's current well-being and challenges through direct engagement, observation, and documentation review and determine which, if any, next actions are needed to promote their safety and well-being.
 - Brief Intervention: Quickly address current and immediate needs identified during brief assessments.
 - Formal Evaluation: Use standardized tools to evaluate a child's presentation, symptoms, needs, and abilities and provide results to facility partners to inform decision-making regarding a child or family's safety or well-being.
3. ***Recommendations for systemic enhancements***
 - Identify and document ideas for adjusting physical space requirements and training facility partners for child well-being .
 - Bring recommendations for approval to USBP, CBP, and DHS Leadership through official channels.
4. ***Promote shared understanding.*** Enhance children's and families' understanding of facility experiences and foster information sharing with external-to-DHS partners, such as other departments and agencies or non-federal entities. This includes:
 - Clarifying mental health diagnoses and health-related recommendations provided by facility partners, such as CBP-contracted medical service personnel.
 - Identifying and communicating immediate well-being needs of children/families to facility or downstream partners that receive these individuals once transferred out of CBP custody.

V. Guiding Standards and Frameworks

The CWB Program integrates *The Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics' Seven Domains of Child Well-Being*³ and the HHS Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's *Six Principles of Trauma Informed Care*.⁴ The CWB Program applies these frameworks to the migrant population at the SWB by focusing on key areas that align with priorities identified by DHS. Specifically, the CWB Program ensures an environment of care, strategies, and practices that promote child well-being and mitigate risks of additional trauma, including:

- **Providing Staff Training:** Providing additional trauma-informed training to empower staff when working with children in CBP custody.
- **Enhancing the Physical Environment:** Recommending and implementing enhancements to the overall physical environment (such as age-appropriate books or outdoor recreation with peers), to increase children's sense of physical and psychological safety in CBP custody.

Additionally, the CWB Program utilizes several clinical frameworks to guide the provision of assessments, interventions, and evaluations by the contracted CWB Specialists. All assessments, interventions, and evaluations conducted by specialists will be provided in a developmentally appropriate and time-sensitive manner, align to the clinical approaches and frameworks guiding the program, and fit the operational context in which they take place.

³ Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics. *America's children: Key national indicators of well-being, 2021*. U.S. Government Printing Office.

⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. HHS Publication No. (SMA) 14-4884. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

VII. Appendix: Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
CWB	Child Well-Being
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
FY	Fiscal Year
HHS	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
P.L.	Public Law
OHS	Office of Health Security
RGV	Rio Grande Valley
SWB	Southwest Border
USBP	U.S. Border Patrol