

**8 USC 1232: Enhancing efforts to combat the trafficking of children**

Text contains those laws in effect on July 19, 2020

**From Title 8-ALIENS AND NATIONALITY**

CHAPTER 12-IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY

SUBCHAPTER II-IMMIGRATION

Part IV-Inspection, Apprehension, Examination, Exclusion, and Removal

**Jump To:**

[Source Credit](#)

[References In Text](#)

[Codification](#)

[Amendments](#)

## §1232. Enhancing efforts to combat the trafficking of children

### (a) Combating child trafficking at the border and ports of entry of the United States

#### (1) Policies and procedures

In order to enhance the efforts of the United States to prevent trafficking in persons, the Secretary of Homeland Security, in conjunction with the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall develop policies and procedures to ensure that unaccompanied alien children in the United States are safely repatriated to their country of nationality or of last habitual residence.

#### (2) Special rules for children from contiguous countries

##### (A) Determinations

Any unaccompanied alien child who is a national or habitual resident of a country that is contiguous with the United States shall be treated in accordance with subparagraph (B), if the Secretary of Homeland Security determines, on a case-by-case basis, that-

- (i) such child has not been a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons, and there is no credible evidence that such child is at risk of being trafficked upon return to the child's country of nationality or of last habitual residence;
- (ii) such child does not have a fear of returning to the child's country of nationality or of last habitual residence owing to a credible fear of persecution; and
- (iii) the child is able to make an independent decision to withdraw the child's application for admission to the United States.

##### (B) Return

An immigration officer who finds an unaccompanied alien child described in subparagraph (A) at a land border or port of entry of the United States and determines that such child is inadmissible under the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.) may-

- (i) permit such child to withdraw the child's application for admission pursuant to section 235(a)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1225(a)(4)); and
- (ii) return such child to the child's country of nationality or country of last habitual residence.

##### (C) Contiguous country agreements

The Secretary of State shall negotiate agreements between the United States and countries contiguous to the United States with respect to the repatriation of children. Such agreements shall be designed to protect children from severe forms of trafficking in persons, and shall, at a minimum, provide that-

- (i) no child shall be returned to the child's country of nationality or of last habitual residence unless returned to appropriate employees or officials, including child welfare officials where available, of the accepting country's government;
- (ii) no child shall be returned to the child's country of nationality or of last habitual residence outside of reasonable business hours; and
- (iii) border personnel of the countries that are parties to such agreements are trained in the terms of such agreements.

#### (3) Rule for other children

The custody of unaccompanied alien children not described in paragraph (2)(A) who are apprehended at the border of the United States or at a United States port of entry shall be treated in accordance with subsection (b).

#### (4) Screening

Within 48 hours of the apprehension of a child who is believed to be described in paragraph (2)(A), but in any event prior to returning such child to the child's country of nationality or of last habitual residence, the child shall be screened to determine whether the child meets the criteria listed in paragraph (2)(A). If the child does not meet such criteria, or if no determination can be made within 48 hours of apprehension, the child shall immediately be transferred to the Secretary of Health and Human Services and treated in accordance with subsection (b). Nothing in this paragraph may be construed to preclude an earlier transfer of the child.

#### **(5) Ensuring the safe repatriation of children**

##### **(A) Repatriation pilot program**

To protect children from trafficking and exploitation, the Secretary of State shall create a pilot program, in conjunction with the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Homeland Security, nongovernmental organizations, and other national and international agencies and experts, to develop and implement best practices to ensure the safe and sustainable repatriation and reintegration of unaccompanied alien children into their country of nationality or of last habitual residence, including placement with their families, legal guardians, or other sponsoring agencies.

##### **(B) Assessment of country conditions**

The Secretary of Homeland Security shall consult the Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and the Trafficking in Persons Report in assessing whether to repatriate an unaccompanied alien child to a particular country.

##### **(C) Report on repatriation of unaccompanied alien children**

Not later than 18 months after December 23, 2008, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, with assistance from the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall submit a report to the Committee on the Judiciary of the Senate and the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives on efforts to improve repatriation programs for unaccompanied alien children. Such report shall include-

- (i) the number of unaccompanied alien children ordered removed and the number of such children actually removed from the United States;
- (ii) a statement of the nationalities, ages, and gender of such children;
- (iii) a description of the policies and procedures used to effect the removal of such children from the United States and the steps taken to ensure that such children were safely and humanely repatriated to their country of nationality or of last habitual residence, including a description of the repatriation pilot program created pursuant to subparagraph (A);
- (iv) a description of the type of immigration relief sought and denied to such children;
- (v) any information gathered in assessments of country and local conditions pursuant to paragraph (2); and
- (vi) statistical information and other data on unaccompanied alien children as provided for in section 279(b)(1)(J) of title 6.

##### **(D) Placement in removal proceedings**

Any unaccompanied alien child sought to be removed by the Department of Homeland Security, except for an unaccompanied alien child from a contiguous country subject to exceptions under subsection (a)(2), shall be-

- (i) placed in removal proceedings under section 240 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1229a);
- (ii) eligible for relief under section 240B of such Act (8 U.S.C. 1229c) at no cost to the child; and
- (iii) provided access to counsel in accordance with subsection (c)(5).

#### **(b) Combating child trafficking and exploitation in the United States**

##### **(1) Care and custody of unaccompanied alien children**

Consistent with section 279 of title 6, and except as otherwise provided under subsection (a), the care and custody of all unaccompanied alien children, including responsibility for their detention, where appropriate, shall be the responsibility of the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

##### **(2) Notification**

Each department or agency of the Federal Government shall notify the Department of Health and Human Services <sup>1</sup> within 48 hours upon-

- (A) the apprehension or discovery of an unaccompanied alien child; or
- (B) any claim or suspicion that an alien in the custody of such department or agency is under 18 years of age.

##### **(3) Transfers of unaccompanied alien children**

Except in the case of exceptional circumstances, any department or agency of the Federal Government that has an unaccompanied alien child in custody shall transfer the custody of such child to the Secretary of Health and Human Services not later than 72 hours after determining that such child is an unaccompanied alien child.

#### **(4) Age determinations**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services, in consultation with the Secretary of Homeland Security, shall develop procedures to make a prompt determination of the age of an alien, which shall be used by the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Secretary of Health and Human Services for children in their respective custody. At a minimum, these procedures shall take into account multiple forms of evidence, including the non-exclusive use of radiographs, to determine the age of the unaccompanied alien.

### **(c) Providing safe and secure placements for children**

#### **(1) Policies and programs**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services, Secretary of Homeland Security, Attorney General, and Secretary of State shall establish policies and programs to ensure that unaccompanied alien children in the United States are protected from traffickers and other persons seeking to victimize or otherwise engage such children in criminal, harmful, or exploitative activity, including policies and programs reflecting best practices in witness security programs.

#### **(2) Safe and secure placements**

##### **(A) Minors in department of health and human services custody**

Subject to section 279(b)(2) of title 6, an unaccompanied alien child in the custody of the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall be promptly placed in the least restrictive setting that is in the best interest of the child. In making such placements, the Secretary may consider danger to self, danger to the community, and risk of flight. Placement of child trafficking victims may include placement in an Unaccompanied Refugee Minor program, pursuant to section 412(d) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1522(d)), if a suitable family member is not available to provide care. A child shall not be placed in a secure facility absent a determination that the child poses a danger to self or others or has been charged with having committed a criminal offense. The placement of a child in a secure facility shall be reviewed, at a minimum, on a monthly basis, in accordance with procedures prescribed by the Secretary, to determine if such placement remains warranted.

##### **(B) Aliens transferred from Department of Health and Human Services to Department of Homeland Security custody**

If a minor described in subparagraph (A) reaches 18 years of age and is transferred to the custody of the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary shall consider placement in the least restrictive setting available after taking into account the alien's danger to self, danger to the community, and risk of flight. Such aliens shall be eligible to participate in alternative to detention programs, utilizing a continuum of alternatives based on the alien's need for supervision, which may include placement of the alien with an individual or an organizational sponsor, or in a supervised group home.

#### **(3) Safety and suitability assessments**

##### **(A) In general**

Subject to the requirements of subparagraph (B), an unaccompanied alien child may not be placed with a person or entity unless the Secretary of Health and Human Services makes a determination that the proposed custodian is capable of providing for the child's physical and mental well-being. Such determination shall, at a minimum, include verification of the custodian's identity and relationship to the child, if any, as well as an independent finding that the individual has not engaged in any activity that would indicate a potential risk to the child.

##### **(B) Home studies**

Before placing the child with an individual, the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall determine whether a home study is first necessary. A home study shall be conducted for a child who is a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons, a special needs child with a disability (as defined in section 12102 of title 42), a child who has been a victim of physical or sexual abuse under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare has been significantly harmed or threatened, or a child whose proposed sponsor clearly presents a risk of abuse, maltreatment, exploitation, or trafficking to the child based on all available objective evidence. The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall conduct follow-up services, during the pendency of removal proceedings, on children for whom a home study was conducted and is authorized to conduct follow-up services in cases involving children with mental health or other needs who could benefit from ongoing assistance from a social welfare agency.

##### **(C) Access to information**

Not later than 2 weeks after receiving a request from the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Homeland Security shall provide information necessary to conduct suitability assessments from appropriate Federal, State, and local law enforcement and immigration databases.

#### **(4) Legal orientation presentations**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall cooperate with the Executive Office for Immigration Review to ensure that custodians receive legal orientation presentations provided through the Legal Orientation Program administered by the Executive Office for Immigration Review. At a minimum, such presentations shall address the custodian's responsibility to attempt to ensure the child's appearance at all immigration proceedings and to protect the child from mistreatment, exploitation, and trafficking.

#### **(5) Access to counsel**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services shall ensure, to the greatest extent practicable and consistent with section 292 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1362), that all unaccompanied alien children who are or have been in the custody of the Secretary or the Secretary of Homeland Security, and who are not described in subsection (a)(2)(A), have counsel to represent them in legal proceedings or matters and protect them from mistreatment, exploitation, and trafficking. To the greatest extent practicable, the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall make every effort to utilize the services of pro bono counsel who agree to provide representation to such children without charge.

#### **(6) Child advocates**

##### **(A) In general**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services is authorized to appoint independent child advocates for child trafficking victims and other vulnerable unaccompanied alien children. A child advocate shall be provided access to materials necessary to effectively advocate for the best interest of the child. The child advocate shall not be compelled to testify or provide evidence in any proceeding concerning any information or opinion received from the child in the course of serving as a child advocate. The child advocate shall be presumed to be acting in good faith and be immune from civil liability for lawful conduct of duties as described in this provision.

##### **(B) Appointment of child advocates**

###### **(i) Initial sites**

Not later than 2 years after March 7, 2013, the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall appoint child advocates at 3 new immigration detention sites to provide independent child advocates for trafficking victims and vulnerable unaccompanied alien children.

###### **(ii) Additional sites**

Not later than 3 years after March 7, 2013, the Secretary shall appoint child advocates at not more than 3 additional immigration detention sites.

###### **(iii) Selection of sites**

Sites at which child advocate programs will be established under this subparagraph shall be located at immigration detention sites at which more than 50 children are held in immigration custody, and shall be selected sequentially, with priority given to locations with-

- (I) the largest number of unaccompanied alien children; and
- (II) the most vulnerable populations of unaccompanied children.

##### **(C) Restrictions**

###### **(i) Administrative expenses**

A child advocate program may not use more than 10 percent of the Federal funds received under this section for administrative expenses.

###### **(ii) Nonexclusivity**

Nothing in this section may be construed to restrict the ability of a child advocate program under this section to apply for or obtain funding from any other source to carry out the programs described in this section.

###### **(iii) Contribution of funds**

A child advocate program selected under this section shall contribute non-Federal funds, either directly or through in-kind contributions, to the costs of the child advocate program in an amount that is not less than 25 percent of the total amount of Federal funds received by the child advocate program under this section. In-kind contributions may not exceed 40 percent of the matching requirement under this clause.

##### **(D) Annual report to Congress**

Not later than 1 year after March 7, 2013, and annually thereafter, the Secretary of Health and Human Services shall submit a report describing the activities undertaken by the Secretary to authorize the appointment of independent Child Advocates for trafficking victims and vulnerable unaccompanied alien children to the Committee on the Judiciary of the Senate and the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives.

#### **(E) Assessment of Child Advocate Program**

##### **(i) In general**

As soon as practicable after March 7, 2013, the Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a study regarding the effectiveness of the Child Advocate Program operated by the Secretary of Health and Human Services.

##### **(ii) Matters to be studied**

In the study required under clause (i), the Comptroller General shall- <sup>2</sup> collect information and analyze the following:

(I) analyze the effectiveness of existing child advocate programs in improving outcomes for trafficking victims and other vulnerable unaccompanied alien children;

(II) evaluate the implementation of child advocate programs in new sites pursuant to subparagraph (B);

(III) evaluate the extent to which eligible trafficking victims and other vulnerable unaccompanied children are receiving child advocate services and assess the possible budgetary implications of increased participation in the program;

(IV) evaluate the barriers to improving outcomes for trafficking victims and other vulnerable unaccompanied children; and

(V) make recommendations on statutory changes to improve the Child Advocate Program in relation to the matters analyzed under subclauses (I) through (IV).

##### **(iii) GAO report**

Not later than 3 years after March 7, 2013, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit the results of the study required under this subparagraph to-

(I) the Committee on the Judiciary of the Senate;

(II) the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the Senate;

(III) the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives; and

(IV) the Committee on Education and the Workforce of the House of Representatives.

#### **(F) Authorization of appropriations**

There are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Health and Human Services to carry out this subsection-

(i) \$1,000,000 for each of the fiscal years 2014 and 2015; and

(ii) \$2,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2018 through 2021.

#### **(d) Permanent protection for certain at-risk children**

##### **(1) Omitted**

##### **(2) Expeditious adjudication**

All applications for special immigrant status under section 101(a)(27)(J) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(J)) shall be adjudicated by the Secretary of Homeland Security not later than 180 days after the date on which the application is filed.

##### **(3) Omitted**

##### **(4) Eligibility for assistance**

###### **(A) In general**

A child who has been granted special immigrant status under section 101(a)(27)(J) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(J)) and who was in the custody of the Secretary of Health and Human Services at the time a dependency order was granted for such child, was receiving services pursuant to section 501(a) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980 (8 U.S.C. 1522 note) at the time such dependency order was granted, or has been granted status under section 101(a)(15)(U) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(U)),<sup>2</sup> shall be eligible for placement and services under section 412(d) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1522(d)) until the earlier of-

(i) the date on which the child reaches the age designated in section 412(d)(2)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1522(d)(2)(B)); or

(ii) the date on which the child is placed in a permanent adoptive home.

###### **(B) State reimbursement**

Subject to the availability of appropriations, if State foster care funds are expended on behalf of a child who is not described in subparagraph (A) and has been granted special immigrant status under section 101(a)(27)(J) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(J)), or status under section 101(a)(15)(U) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(U)),<sup>2</sup> the Federal Government shall reimburse the State in which the child resides for such expenditures by the State.

**(5) State courts acting in loco parentis**

A department or agency of a State, or an individual or entity appointed by a State court or juvenile court located in the United States, acting in loco parentis, shall not be considered a legal guardian for purposes of this section or section 279 of title 6.

**(6) Transition rule**

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, an alien described in section 101(a)(27)(J) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(27)(J)), as amended by paragraph (1), may not be denied special immigrant status under such section after December 23, 2008, based on age if the alien was a child on the date on which the alien applied for such status.

**(7) Omitted**

**(8) Specialized needs of unaccompanied alien children**

Applications for asylum and other forms of relief from removal in which an unaccompanied alien child is the principal applicant shall be governed by regulations which take into account the specialized needs of unaccompanied alien children and which address both procedural and substantive aspects of handling unaccompanied alien **children's** cases.

**(e) Training**

The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and the Attorney General shall provide specialized training to all Federal personnel, and upon request, state<sup>1</sup> and local personnel, who have substantive contact with unaccompanied alien children. Such personnel shall be trained to work with unaccompanied alien children, including identifying children who are victims of severe forms of trafficking in persons, and children for whom asylum or special immigrant relief may be appropriate, including children described in subsection (a)(2).

**(f) Omitted**

**(g) Definition of unaccompanied alien child**

For purposes of this section, the term "unaccompanied alien child" has the meaning given such term in section 279(g) of title 6.

**(h) Effective date**

This section-

(1) shall take effect on the date that is 90 days after December 23, 2008; and

(2) shall also apply to all aliens in the United States in pending proceedings before the Department of Homeland Security or the Executive Office for Immigration Review, or related administrative or Federal appeals, on December 23, 2008.

**(i) Grants and contracts**

The Secretary of Health and Human Services may award grants to, and enter into contracts with, voluntary agencies to carry out this section and section 279 of title 6.

( Pub. L. 110–457, title II, §235, Dec. 23, 2008, 122 Stat. 5074 ; Pub. L. 113–4, title XII, §§1261–1263, Mar. 7, 2013, 127 Stat. 156–159 ; Pub. L. 115–393, title III, §301(d), Dec. 21, 2018, 132 Stat. 5272 . )

## REFERENCES IN TEXT

The Immigration and Nationality Act, referred to in subsec. (a)(2)(B), is act [June 27, 1952, ch. 477, 66 Stat. 163](#), which is classified principally to this chapter. For complete classification of this Act to the Code, see Short Title note set out under section 1101 of this title and Tables.

March 7, 2013, referred to in subsec. (c)(6)(E)(iii), was in the original "the date of the enactment of this Act", which was translated as meaning the date of enactment of Pub. L. 113–4, known as the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013, which enacted subsec. (c)(6)(B) to (F), to reflect the probable intent of Congress. Other references to March 7, 2013, in subpars. (B) to (F) of subsec. (c)(6) were in the original "the date of the enactment of the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013".

## CODIFICATION

Section is comprised of section 235 of Pub. L. 110–457. Pars. (1), (3), and (7) of section 235(d) of Pub. L. 110–457 amended sections 1101, 1255, and 1158 of this title, respectively. Section 235(f) of Pub. L. 110–457 amended section 279 of Title 6, Domestic Security.

Section was enacted as part of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008, and not as part of the Immigration and Nationality Act which comprises this chapter.

## AMENDMENTS

**2018**-Subsec. (c)(6)(F). Pub. L. 115–393, §301(d)(1), substituted "Secretary of Health and Human Services" for "Secretary and Human Services" in introductory provisions.

Subsec. (c)(6)(F)(ii). Pub. L. 115–393, §301(d)(2), substituted "fiscal years 2018 through 2021" for "the fiscal years 2016 and 2017".

**2013**-Subsec. (c)(2). Pub. L. 113–4, §1261, designated existing provisions as subpar. (A), inserted heading, and added subpar. (B).

Subsec. (c)(6). Pub. L. 113–4, §1262, designated existing provisions as subpar. (A), inserted heading, struck out "and criminal" after "immune from civil", and added subpars. (B) to (F).

Subsec. (d)(4)(A). Pub. L. 113–4, §1263(1), in introductory provisions, struck out "either" before "in the custody", substituted "such child," for "such child or who", and inserted ", or has been granted status under section 101(a)(15)(U) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(U))," before ", shall be eligible for placement".

Subsec. (d)(4)(B). Pub. L. 113–4, §1263(2), inserted ", or status under section 101(a)(15)(U) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(15)(U))," before ", the Federal Government".

<sup>1</sup> *So in original. Probably should be capitalized.*

<sup>2</sup> *So in original.*