



**Houston**

## Oklahoma Army Base To House Up To 1,200 Illegal Immigrant Children

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**OKLAHOMA CITY (AP)** — As many as 1,200 children who were detained while trying to enter the U.S. illegally will be taken to Fort Sill this week as federal officials try to find their families or place them with a sponsor, federal and military officials said Monday.

The unaccompanied minors, most of them teenagers from Central America, will start arriving at Fort Sill from Arizona starting Friday, according to Fort Sill and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The children and teens are among the more than 47,000 unaccompanied minors taken into custody at the border since October.

Federal authorities plan to use a holding facility in Nogales, Arizona, as a way station where the children will be vaccinated and checked medically before being sent to Fort Sill and other housing facilities in Texas and California.

Fort Sill said it will temporarily hold between 600 and 1,200 minors in vacant housing at the Army post for up to four months, or as long as directed. DHHS's Administration for Children and Families will be responsible for their care.

"Fort Sill will provide a vacant facility historically used by soldiers set apart from main post that offers sleeping quarters, bathing and toilet facilities, as well as multi-purpose gathering space," Keith Pannell and Nancy Elliott, spokespeople for Fort Sill, said in a statement released Monday.

Oklahoma's congressional delegation criticized the plan, saying military bases shouldn't be used for such purposes.

"Using Fort Sill and other military bases to house illegal immigrants is simply an inappropriate use of military facilities," said Republican Rep. Tom Cole, whose district includes the Army post about 85 miles southwest of Oklahoma City. "Moreover, I am concerned that what begins as an emergency measure could, over time, evolve into a permanent juvenile detention center for those who have entered the country illegally."

The move is part of the **Unaccompanied Alien Children program**, which provides foster care, group homes and residential treatment centers for minors who try to cross the border without their parents or guardians. It also **provides classroom education, health care, vocational training and legal services**, according to DHHS's website.

The U.S. **Department of Homeland Security last month started flying immigrants in the U.S. illegally to Arizona from the Rio Grande Valley in Texas after the number of immigrants — including more than 48,000 children traveling on their own — overwhelmed the Border Patrol there.**

Immigrant families were flown from Texas and released in Arizona, then told to report to a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement office near where they were traveling within 15 days. ICE has said the immigrants were mostly families from Central America fleeing extreme poverty and violence.

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