



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of the Deputy Attorney General

The Deputy Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20530

September 24, 2025

MEMORANDUM FOR ALL DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES

FROM: THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL *[Signature]*

SUBJECT: Expansion of Joint Task Force Alpha and Prioritizing the Prosecution of UAC Offenses¹

Cartels and other Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) pose a substantial threat to the security of the United States. These groups commit brutal and intolerable violent crimes and are responsible for massive flows of illegal immigration and narcotics into the United States through our Southern and Northern borders, acting in concert with co-conspirators throughout North and South America. Indeed, as President Trump has made clear, these entities “threaten the safety of the American people, the security of the United States, and the stability of the international order in the Western Hemisphere,” posing “an unacceptable national security risk” to our country.²

This situation is untenable. The Department of Justice (Department) and its law enforcement partners are committed to protecting the United States against invasion, working to secure the total elimination of Cartels and TCOs, protecting human life, and aggressively enforcing our criminal laws. Joint Task Force Alpha (JTFA) is critical to this mission.

On September 4, 2025, Attorney General Bondi announced the expansion of JTFA, the Department’s taskforce dedicated to combating human smuggling and trafficking committed by cartels and TCOs. A highly successful partnership with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), JTFA investigates and prosecutes human smuggling and trafficking and related immigration crimes that impact public safety and border security. JTFA has shown that dedicated prosecutorial resources, along with robust investigative and other case support, can have an outsized impact on deterrence and holding to account those who commit these terrible crimes. JTFA’s work has expanded to districts along the country’s northern and maritime borders, in addition to districts along our southwest border, strengthened partnerships with federal law

¹ This guidance is not intended to, does not, and may not be relied upon to create, any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any person.

² See “Designating Cartels And Other Organizations As Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Specially Designated Global Terrorists,” Executive Order § 1(a) (Jan. 20, 2025).

enforcement agencies and foreign law enforcement counterparts. Additionally, JTFA will lead and support a Department-wide focus on crimes involving unaccompanied children.

This memorandum: (1) describes JTFA's enhanced and elevated mission, including to serve as the focal point for significant smuggling matters, and (2) directs Department prosecutors, including JTFA and U.S. Attorneys' Offices, to dedicate resources to prosecuting and to prioritize prosecuting crimes relating to the fraudulent sponsorship of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UACs).

I. Expansion of Joint Task Force Alpha

The Department must use all tools at its disposal to keep America safe.³ This includes targeting and eliminating the leaders and organizers of Cartels and TCOs involved in smuggling and trafficking people into our country. Given the importance of this mission and the successes JTFA has had in prosecuting these crimes, JTFA is elevated to the Office of the Attorney General and will be jointly supervised by my Office.

JTFA must also expand its geographic footprint to confront the increasing threat of human smuggling and trafficking along all of our borders. Accordingly, JTFA will now also consist of federal prosecutors from the U.S. Attorneys' Offices for the Southern District of Texas, Western District of Texas, District of New Mexico, District of Arizona, Southern District of California, Southern District of Florida, Northern District of New York, and the District of Vermont. Additional prosecutorial resources will be provided from the Criminal Division and Civil Rights Division to partner on these investigations and cases.

JTFA will also expand its partnerships with law enforcement agencies. In addition to law enforcement agents and analysts from DHS's Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations, Customs and Border Protection, and Border Patrol, JTFA will utilize investigative resources from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Drug Enforcement Agency, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Through these partnerships, JTFA will rely on data analysis to focus on the highest priority targets, including members of Cartels and TCOs that are responsible for the most prolific or egregious human smuggling and trafficking offenses.

JTFA will continue to work closely with foreign partners to effectively enhance coordination in transnational law enforcement efforts against human smuggling and trafficking and target those operating outside of the United States who violate our laws. These partnerships are critical to ensuring the total elimination of Cartels and TCOs that wreak havoc across the region and preventing illegal migration to the United States. JTFA has directly supported the arrests in foreign countries of numerous TCOs members and co-conspirators to ensure justice and accountability reach beyond our borders. The primary focus, however, is bringing those leaders and organizers to justice in the United States. Recently, the Government of Mexico transferred to

³ See AG Bondi Memo., "Total Elimination of Cartels and Transnational Criminal Organizations" (Feb. 5, 2025), at 1 ("[W]e must harness the resources of the Department of Justice and empower federal prosecutors throughout the country to work urgently with the Department of Homeland Security and other parts of the government toward the goal of eliminating these threats to U.S. sovereignty.").

the United States a JTFA defendant who was the leader of an organization responsible for smuggling thousands of illegal aliens into the United States from Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Somalia, Cameroon, Senegal, Mauritania, Ethiopia, Egypt, and other countries. JTFA will aggressively prosecute this type of unlawful conduct.

Although JTFA is a key component of the Department's mission to tackle human smuggling, all Department prosecutors must use all available criminal statutes to combat the flood of illegal immigration.⁴ Targeting Cartel and TCO members responsible for human smuggling and trafficking must and will be a priority for the Department and all of its law enforcement partners. Accordingly, U.S. Attorneys' Offices are directed to consult with JTFA on any significant human smuggling and trafficking matters to ensure that all available Department resources are brought to bear for the highest priority cases.

In certain circumstances, JTFA may have matters that align with other law enforcement priority initiatives, such as the Homeland Security Task Forces (HSTFs) established throughout the United States.⁵ JTFA's whole-of-Department, prosecutor-led network and other dedicated Department and DHS headquarters resources are well-positioned to complement the work of HSTFs. JTFA will work side-by-side with HSTFs to manage efficient use of resources and maximize the overall enforcement impact. The JTFA director will coordinate with the HSTF National Executive Steering Committee and the Regional Executive Steering Committees to ensure that all available law enforcement tools and the Department's resources are fully leveraged to investigate and prosecute jointly designated cases.

II. UAC-Related Offenses

The harms caused by illegal immigration are not limited to human smuggling and trafficking. Among the millions of people who attempted to enter the United States illegally in recent years were hundreds of thousands of Unaccompanied Alien Children (UACs). Shortly after UACs are apprehended at the border, they are transferred to the custody of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Pending immigration proceedings, HHS ORR is responsible for the care and custody of UACs, which includes placing UACs in the care of qualified sponsors. For years, sponsors were not vetted adequately, nor was the welfare of UACs ensured. Consequently, UACs have been more vulnerable to and, in some instances, have fallen prey to smuggling, trafficking, sexual assault, and forced labor.

Accordingly, JTFA will lead and support U.S. Attorneys' Offices in the prosecution of crimes related to UACs. JTFA prosecutors are engaged with an interagency law enforcement task force that is assembling leads for potential crimes related to UACs, and investigators are presenting these cases to U.S. Attorneys' Offices for prosecution review. Each U.S. Attorney's Office shall designate a UAC coordinator to streamline communication with law enforcement agencies and facilitate prosecution of UAC cases in the district. U.S. Attorneys' Offices shall pursue charges

⁴ See AG Bondi Memo., "General Policy Regarding Charging, Plea Negotiations, and Sentencing" (Feb. 5, 2025).

⁵ See "Protecting the American People Against Invasion" Executive Order § 6 (Jan. 20, 2025).

relating to UAC sponsor fraud, immigration-related violations by UAC sponsors, and other crimes involving UACs, consistent with the then-Acting Deputy Attorney General's January 21, 2025 Memorandum on Interim Policy Changes Regarding Charging, Sentencing, and Immigration Enforcement. In addition to charges related to labor or sex trafficking (18 U.S.C. ch. 77, part I), other charges may include offenses, such as making false statements (18 U.S.C. § 1001), aggravated identity theft (18 U.S.C. § 1028A), or bringing in or harboring aliens (8 U.S.C. § 1324). Sponsors themselves may be in the United States illegally, and Districts should consider charges relating to illegal entry or reentry, or importation of aliens for illicit purposes (8 U.S.C. §§ 1325, 1326, 1328).

In UAC cases involving significant sponsor fraud, sex trafficking, or forced labor, U.S. Attorneys' Offices should consult with JTFA to ensure appropriate information sharing across judicial districts and to determine if additional prosecutorial resources are needed to hold accountable those involved in UAC-related crimes. Moreover, declination decisions relating to UACs shall be disclosed as Urgent Reports pursuant to Justice Manual § 1-13.130. On a quarterly basis, U.S. Attorneys' Offices shall report statistics to EOUSA, broken down by law enforcement agency, regarding the number of UAC-related cases referred to the Office, the number of pending UAC-related investigations and prosecutions, the number of UAC-related convictions, and the resulting sentences.