

Catholic Charities aims to house 50 unaccompanied immigrant youths

By Maria Wiering

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Catholic Charities of Baltimore is applying to house 50 children and youths who have crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally and unaccompanied, and who are now the focus of an international humanitarian crisis and national immigration policy debate.

“The federal government has requested proposals from providers who could assist with providing shelter care and support to these youth, many of whom have experienced significant trauma along the way,” Catholic Charities Executive Director William J. McCarthy Jr. wrote in a July 16 letter to the organization’s employees. “With our expertise in providing services as well as residential and other programming for children and youth at St. Vincent’s Villa, we believe that we are well equipped to provide services for this critical need.”

Located in Timonium, St. Vincent’s Villa serves children and youths with emotional and behavioral challenges. McCarthy also pointed to the organization’s 50-year-old Esperanza Center in Fells Point – which provides services to immigrants, many of whom are Latino – as an example of Catholic Charities’ longstanding commitment to the immigrant community.

Esperanza serves more than 5,500 immigrants annually, and has provided assistance to more than 50 unaccompanied minors each month for the past several months, McCarthy said.

“The vast majority of these youth are coming from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in an effort to escape some very dangerous living situations in hopes of connecting with and reuniting with family members who are already in the country,” McCarthy said in the letter.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops estimated in January that 60,000 unaccompanied Central American youth would cross the border this year.

McCarthy emphasized that Catholic Charities is submitting a proposal and has yet to be selected as a provider.

Housing in Maryland for unaccompanied minors has proven contentious. Earlier in the week, anti-immigrant graffiti was sprayed on the side of a Westminster building briefly considered as a potential site for their temporary housing.

In a conversation with the Catholic Review, McCarthy said that housing children in need is something the church has always done, comparing Catholic Charities' current efforts to the orphanages Catholic organizations ran in the 19th and early 20th centuries for immigrant children, some of whom lost parents during their travel to the United States.

Want to learn more about St. Vincent's Villa? Let celebrated employee Ray Wright tell you in this article.

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