

PRESS RELEASE



Arizona House Democrats

Rep. Rebecca Rios, D-Phoenix (District 27), Democratic Leader
Rep. Randall Friese, D-Tucson (District 9), Assistant Democratic Leader
Rep. Charlene Fernandez, D-Yuma (District 4), Democratic Whip
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Lawmakers Press for State Investigation of MVM Facilities Holding Separated Children in Phoenix Office Buildings

PHOENIX State Capitol – Reps. Kelli Butler and Kirsten Engel are pressing for a state investigation after legislators learned this week that MVM -- the federal contractor that recently admitted secretly holding children overnight in an office building in Phoenix -- is continuing to hold children overnight while transporting them in Arizona.

MVM closed one temporary holding location at a Phoenix office building after it became [public](#) last week. But, after a new [story](#) broke on Tuesday about a second secret site in Phoenix operated by MVM and which has since also closed, Butler, D-Phoenix, and Engel, D-Tucson, said state authorities must do more to ensure the safety of the children being transported by this and other companies operating within Arizona. In addition to pressing DHS to investigate MVM sites, Butler pledged to introduce legislation in 2019 to close any loophole that might allow federal contractors acting as "guardians" for detained immigrant children to sidestep licensing and oversight.

“The policy of separating children from their families was wrong, and the secrecy that companies like MVM are employing just underscores that point even more,” Butler said. “We want to know what MVM has done with those children, are they safe? And why does this company keep playing this game of hide and seek to avoid any oversight or scrutiny?”

Butler and other lawmakers learned that MVM was still transporting children in Arizona on Monday, the same day they participated in a bi-partisan briefing with the Arizona Department of Health Services and executives from Southwest Key aimed at obtaining a better understanding of efforts to reunite children separated from their families by federal border authorities.

ADHS Director Dr. Cara Christ had written to Butler last week that “this is a very difficult situation the Department does not ultimately have the authority to address...ADHS does not have the authority or influence to compel the federal government to change their practices or initiate an investigation.”

Butler disagrees with that assessment, saying, "If they are keeping kids overnight, ADHS should have the statutory authority to license them, or explain why they don't think this qualifies as a childcare facility. We shouldn't have to wait for legislation to fix this."

In a letter sent to Christ on Wednesday [attached], Butler and Engel pressed for state oversight of MVM facilities,

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"We are asking for an investigation of MVM's pattern and practice of using inadequate and unlicensed facilities as de facto child care facilities in our state."

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