



# EXPLAINER

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## Federal Spending on Immigration: Examining Key Programs and Impacts

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### Introduction

Every year, Congress funds federal government agencies and programs through the annual appropriations process. As part of this process, Congress assigns funding to various immigration-related agencies and programs. These funding decisions underscore the differences among the House, Senate, and White House's immigration priorities. This explainer highlights those differences related to two key immigration issues in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 appropriations process: immigration enforcement and refugee assistance. This explainer also details the human impact that immigration funding has on real families. For a comprehensive look at the FY 2024 appropriations process, check out [From Programs to People: The FY2024 Appropriations Process](#).

### Funding for Immigration Enforcement & Border Patrol

#### Funding Proposals for FY 2024

During the annual appropriations process, Congress funds U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), key agencies that manage the nation's immigration system and border. ICE enforces immigration and customs regulations, including deportation proceedings, and investigates transnational crime. CBP manages the country's borders and facilitates trade and travel. Both agencies are housed under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). For a more detailed description of ICE and CBP's work and tactics, see [The Militarization of Border Communities](#).

#### Customs and Border Protection

Table 1 below outlines the President, House, and Senate's funding proposals for CBP and ICE next year. The President initially proposed a slight cut to CBP compared to FY 2023. While the full House of Representatives has not considered the FY 2024 Homeland Security appropriations bill, the House Appropriations Committee approved [H.R. 4367](#), increasing funding for CBP to [\\$19.9 billion](#). The Senate Appropriations Committee has also approved its FY 2024 Homeland Security

appropriations bill, providing [\\$18.1 billion](#) for CBP. **Should both chambers pass their respective DHS funding proposals, both will give CBP more than \$1 billion more than the President initially requested for CBP, and CBP funding would be dramatically higher than the FY 2023 enacted level.**

### ***Immigration and Customs Enforcement***

For ICE, President Biden initially requested [\\$8.3 billion](#) for FY 2024, slightly less than the roughly \$8.4 billion that Congress provided for the agency in FY 2023. The House Appropriations Committee increased ICE funding to [\\$9.8 billion](#) for FY 2024. The Senate Appropriations Committee has proposed [\\$8.9 billion](#) for ICE in FY 2024. **Again, both the House and Senate proposals are higher than the President’s initial request.**

### ***Supplemental Funding***

On August 10, 2023, the White House [requested](#) supplemental funding for the first quarter of FY 2024 for immigration enforcement, including [detention, border militarization](#), and surveillance. Supplemental appropriations layer over funds already included in the regular appropriations for a given year and are not subject to spending caps, pay-as-you-go policies, or budgetary controls. Requesting supplemental funds outside of the regular appropriations process is one way that some departments, like DHS, can [substantially increase](#) their already large budgets, and CBP has previously [misused](#) these extra funds. Even if Congress passes a [continuing resolution \(CR\)](#) to fund the government at current levels, supplemental requests can still advance as [“anomalies,”](#) which Congress may incorporate into a CR to fund specific programs at new levels. In their letter, the White House requested that Congress include the supplemental funds in a potential short-term CR.

The White House request includes \$1.7 billion for CBP and \$759 million for ICE to respond to “surges along the southwest border.” **The supplemental requests bring the total White House proposals for CBP and ICE funding in FY 2024 to \$18.1 billion and \$9.1 billion, respectively.** Both figures remain below the House’s proposed funding levels. The White House’s latest CBP proposal is roughly in line with the Senate’s; however, its ICE proposal exceeds the Senate’s.

**Table 1: FY2024 Funding Proposals for CBP and ICE**

<b>Program</b>	<b>FY23 Funding (Enacted)</b>	<b>FY24 POTUS Proposal</b>	<b>FY24 House Proposal</b>	<b>FY24 Senate Proposal</b>
<b>CBP</b>	\$16.5 billion	\$16.4 billion <i>+\$1.7 billion supplemental request: \$18.1 billion</i>	\$19.9 billion	\$18.1 billion

<b>ICE</b>	\$8.4 billion	\$8.3 billion <i>+\$759 million supplemental request: \$9.1 billion</i>	\$9.8 billion	\$8.9 billion
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**Sources:** [Senate Report 118-85](#); [House Report 118-123](#); [Letter from OMB Director Shalanda D. Young to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, August 10, 2023](#).

## Human Impacts

Congress has appropriated over [\\$442 billion](#) for immigration enforcement since DHS’s creation in 2003. Every year since, [Congress has spent more](#) on immigration enforcement than it has allocated for all other federal criminal law enforcement agencies combined.

**When funding for ICE and CBP increases, the agencies can channel additional resources to militarize the border, target immigrant communities, and place more people in detention. This, in turn, can have deadly consequences for immigrants.** For example, the LaSalle ICE Processing Center in Louisiana was [scrutinized](#) in 2018 for its inadequate medical care, freezing conditions, and limited outdoor access for detainees. Roxsana Hernandez, a transgender Honduran woman ICE placed in a frigid detention cell without access to medical care, died in 2018 because of health complications worsened by her detention conditions.

More recently, in May 2023, 8-year-old [Anadith Danay Reyes Alvarez](#), who suffered from pre-existing health conditions, died after she spent over a week in CBP custody, even though agents are instructed to hold detainees for no longer than three days. Anadith tested positive for the flu and complained about pain and fever, but was dismissed multiple times by medical staff and denied ambulance requests on the same day she tragically passed.

The southern border’s militarization and aggressive ICE and CBP tactics have also eroded trust between immigrant communities, border communities, and the government. [A 2021 survey](#) found that about 40 percent of DACA recipients worry daily about being detained or deported, and nearly half worry daily about the same happening to a family member. Nearly 70 percent of those with children said they fear daily that they will be separated from their children. As a result, these communities are hesitant to engage with local law enforcement or community services for fear of drawing attention from immigration authorities.

## Funding for Refugee Assistance

### Funding Proposals for FY 2024

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), housed under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is also a key agency implementing immigration

policy. Under ACF, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) provides vital services to newly arrived migrant children under the Unaccompanied Children (UC) program.

For FY 2024, President Biden requested [\\$5.5 billion](#) for the UC program, the same amount that Congress provided for FY 2023. The Senate Appropriations Committee’s HHS funding bill also includes [\\$5.5 billion](#) for the UC program. The full Senate has not yet considered the legislation.

In contrast, the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Subcommittee [bill draft](#) includes roughly \$2.8 billion for various programs within HHS like the refugee assistance programs, the UC program, aid for trafficking victims, and more. The bill does not specify the funding level proposed for the UC program, but a [summary](#) from the House Appropriations Committee majority touts a reduction in “funding for programs that support unaccompanied alien children.” This reduction in funding could mean fewer children receiving vital services, like medical care. **Indeed, the House’s allocation for all refugee and entrant assistance programs is roughly half of what Congress provided just for unaccompanied children in FY 2023—a substantial cut.**

Additionally, ACF administers [other services](#) like financial, medical, and educational support that helps refugees become self-supporting and integrate into life in the U.S. President Biden proposed increasing these resettlement services (known as Transitional and Medical Services) from \$564 million to \$1 billion in FY 2024. However, the Senate Appropriations Committee’s bill flat funds Transitional and Medical Services at [\\$564 million](#). Again, the House bill does not specify the amount of funding it would allocate for Transitional and Medical Services. However, this program includes the same funding pot for refugee and entrant assistance referenced above, for which the House provides just under \$2.8 billion.

Similarly, President Biden proposed \$686 million in FY 2024 for the Refugee Support Services program, which focuses on assistance with early employment through English language training, job training and placement, interpretation and translation services, and child care, among other services. The President’s proposal is more than double the amount Congress provided for Refugee Support Services in FY 2023 ([\\$307 million](#)). However, the Senate Appropriations Committee’s bill keeps funding for the program flat next year. Again, the House bill does not reference a specific funding level for this program. Table 2 illustrates the contrasts among these proposals.

**Table 2: FY2024 Funding Proposals for Refugee Assistance**

Program	FY23 Funding (Enacted)	FY24 POTUS Proposal	FY24 House Proposal	FY24 Senate Proposal
UC	\$5.5 billion	\$5.5 billion	TBD	\$5.5 billion

<b>Transitional and Medical Services</b>	\$564 million	\$1 billion	TBD	\$564 million
<b>Refugee Support Services</b>	\$307 million	\$686 million	TBD	\$307 million

Sources: [Senate Report 118-84](#); [Fiscal Year 2024 Administration for Children and Families Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees](#).

## Impacts on Children and Families

**Failing to boost funding for refugee assistance programs risks leaving families without the health care, language and job training, and other support they need to build a successful life in the U.S. Young children seeking safety will be especially vulnerable if the UC program does not have sufficient resources.** The children the UC program supports take dangerous journeys to the U.S. for safety and a better life. The reasons for their migration are diverse and deeply personal, ranging from escaping gang violence and persecution to seeking reunification with family members already in the U.S.

For example, [Juan](#), a five-year-old from Honduras, fled to the U.S. with his mother to escape a stalker’s threats and violence. After facing terrifying experiences in Matamoros, including kidnapping and extreme weather conditions, Juan's mother decided to send him alone to the border for protection. Similarly, [Oscar](#) from El Salvador and his family fled threats of violence due to his father's military background. After a traumatic separation at the U.S.-Mexico border, Oscar's father, fearing for his son's safety amidst kidnappings and assault, sent Oscar across the border alone. Once in the U.S., these children were supported by the UC program, which provided them with essential services such as counseling, education, and health care.

The human impact of appropriations for the UC program goes beyond numbers. While in ORR’s care, children like Juan and Oscar receive a [range of services](#), including case management, legal services, physical and mental health care, education, and recreational activities. These services are lifelines for children, helping them heal from trauma, navigate the immigration system, and integrate into their new communities. Any reduction in support could mean fewer children like Juan and Oscar receiving the care and assistance they desperately need.

## Conclusion

The funding decisions Congress makes play a pivotal role in shaping the immigration policy landscape in the U.S. An increase in funding for agencies like CBP and ICE, for instance, can lead to heightened border security and enforcement actions, potentially resulting in more detentions and harms to people like Roxsana Hernandez. Conversely, as the President initially proposed, a reduction in funding for these enforcement agencies, coupled with increased support for social services for refugees like Juan and Oscar, could allow for a more compassionate and holistic

approach to immigration. While Congress has yet to decide how much to spend on the functions above next year, we know that the funding Congress appropriates for these various programs will have significant human impacts in FY 2024.

***The Congressional Progressive Caucus Center thanks the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights, Detention Watch Network, National Immigrant Justice Center, and Bend the Arc: Jewish Action for their comments and insights.***