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## Ohio labor trafficking case -- did federal agency's mistake deliver Guatemalan minors to human traffickers? editorial



Undocumented minors were trafficked from Guatemala to work in Ohio factory farms.

(*Associated Press*)

By [Editorial Board](#)

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All human trafficking is labor trafficking.

Sex trafficking – quite rightfully – garners the most attention and outrage. U.S. Attorney Steve Dettelbach in Cleveland views it as a particularly egregious subset of labor trafficking.

Yet while labor trafficking may not receive the same media attention as sex trafficking, a recent prosecution in federal court in Toledo demonstrates the same cold-blooded exploitation of minors that distinguishes all aspects of the modern slave trade.

The case also raises concerns about the effectiveness of federal child placement safeguards for unaccompanied minors who get to the U.S. border.

In the Toledo case, according to a federal indictment, at least five unaccompanied Guatemalan minors placed into federal custody at the border -- one as young as 14 -- were released by the Office of Refugee Resettlement not to relatives or family friends, but to individuals hired by the traffickers who also were in the country illegally. The resettlement agency is supposed to check into the background of all those who take charge of unaccompanied minors. Instead, the young people were trafficked to Ohio, where they were forced to work punishing hours at egg farms near Marion.

Aroldo Castillo-Serrano, 33, a Guatemalan who was illegally in the United States, was described as a leader of the human trafficking syndicate, according to the indictment. He [pleaded guilty last month](#) to labor trafficking and witness tampering. A co-conspirator, Conrado Salgado Soto, 52, of Mexico, also pleaded guilty to similar offenses.

The investigation is ongoing, Dettelbach said.

The indictment states that in 2014 the defendants decided to focus on minors, "believing them to be easier to bring successfully into the country, easier to control, and harder workers."

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman, a Cincinnati-area Republican who chairs the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation, sent a letter to the Obama administration, saying the unaccompanied-child placement process had "[gravely failed](#)" the teens in the Toledo case.

"I am concerned that the failure ... is part of a systemic problem rather than a one-off incident," Portman wrote in an email for this editorial.

The ongoing federal investigation must address the role federal officials may have played in allowing these unaccompanied minors to be placed in the custody of human traffickers.