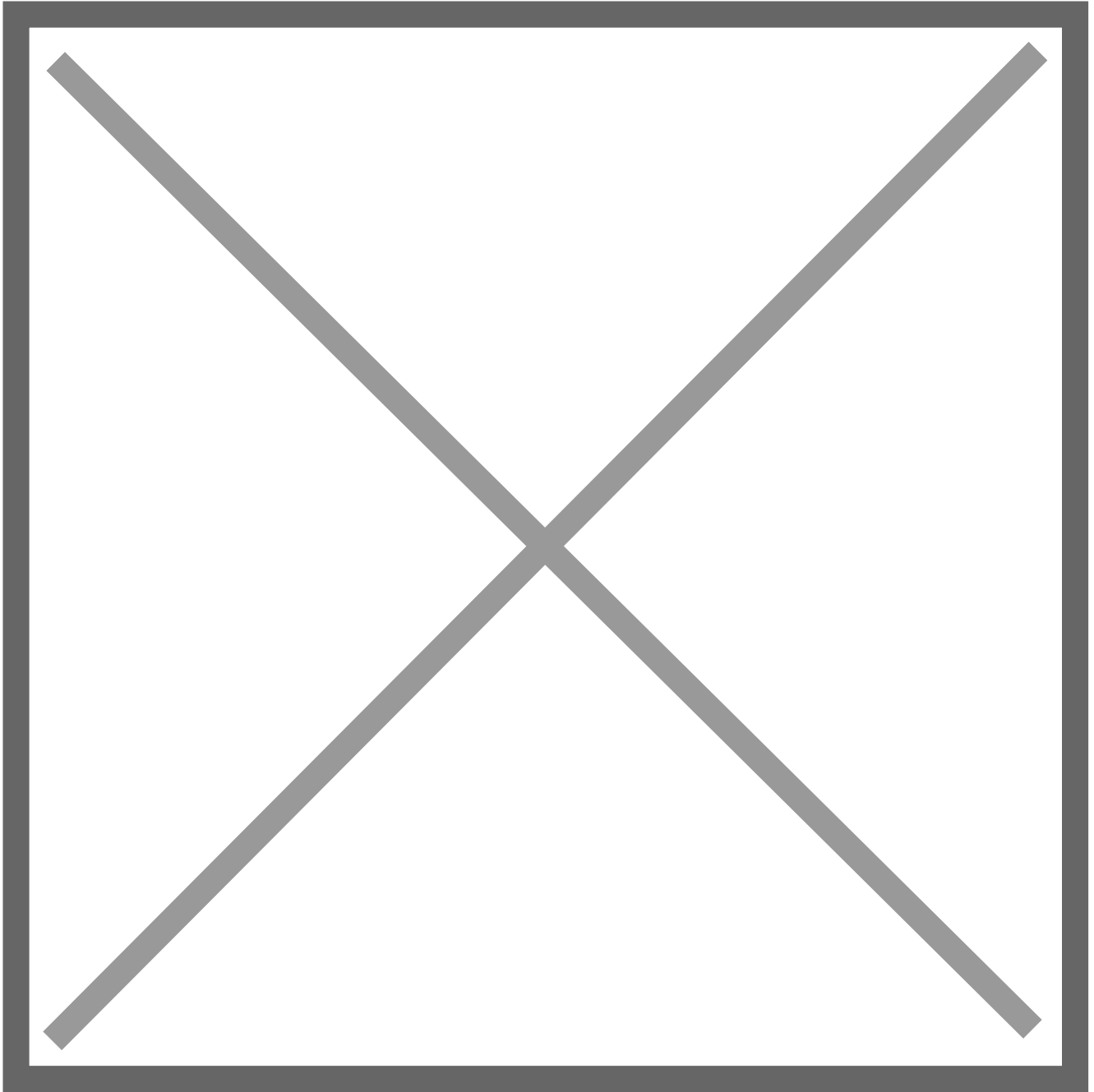


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A Venezuelan migrant family deported from the U.S. walks near the border in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, Jan. 22, 2026. Estrella del Paso, a Catholic ministry of the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, that serves tens of thousands, has exhausted its reserves after seven months of not receiving payment from the federal government for its program that represents unaccompanied immigrant children. (OSV News/Reuters/Jose Luis Gonzalez)



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El Paso, Texas — July 23, 2026

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A legal aid ministry of the Diocese of El Paso, Texas, that serves tens of thousands has exhausted its reserves after seven months of not receiving payment from the federal government for its program that represents unaccompanied immigrant children.

"They've been completely depleted by the current situation," Melissa Lopez said July 20. She is executive director of Estrella del Paso, which used to be Diocesan Migrant and Refugee Services, or DMRS, the provider of legal services in West Texas and New Mexico for clients mainly from Latin America.

DMRS started out as a collaboration between the El Paso Diocese and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in response to the 1986 amnesty program for those in the country without authorization. The agency came under subcontract with the government to give legal representation to unaccompanied minors under a congressional mandate. And payment was very regular, noted Lopez. The ministry became an independent nonprofit in 1990 and was renamed Estrella del Paso in 2023.

Estrella del Paso and other legal services for unaccompanied migrant children in March 2025 sued the departments of Health and Human Services and Interior, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement over withdrawing funding for this service. A federal judge ordered a temporary injunction that made the departments continue paying for the services, which for Estrella del Paso amounts to approximately \$900,000 owed so far. That will increase after the end of July, Lopez said.

U.S. District Judge Araceli Martínez-Olguín ordered the plaintiffs July 16 to meet with the federal government to come to terms over the unpaid amounts before the next hearing on July 23, according to Lopez.

Apart from the money owed, the continuation of the contract with the government is unknown. Lopez said it is up for renewal at the end of July, but the current situation makes the fate of their services even more uncertain. Because of this, she told OSV News, the team at Estrella del Paso on July 17 made the decision to no longer accept unaccompanied children's cases. However, they will continue work on the several hundred cases they hold.

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This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. [View the full series.](#)