



# Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

## Summary of CRCL's Recommendations and USCG Responses *Operation Vigilant Sentry*

On August 26, 2024, the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) responded to a Recommendation Memorandum issued in April 2024 by the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) regarding the treatment of migrants interdicted in Caribbean waters as part of Operation Vigilant Sentry (OVS). USCG concurred with three of CRCL's recommendations and partially concurred with three.

### Background

On November 4, 2022, CRCL received a letter signed by 289 non-governmental organizations, alleging that the U.S. government's policy of interdicting Haitian asylum seekers in international waters and repatriating them to Haiti prevented them from accessing the U.S. asylum system. As a result, CRCL initiated an investigation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's operations involving Caribbean maritime interdictions of migrants who may be seeking protection based on a fear of persecution or torture in their countries of origin. The investigation, which spanned multiple DHS Components, included an evaluation of USCG policies and practices for interdicting migrant vessels in the Caribbean, USCG's process for identifying and referring possible fear claims and trafficking concerns to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services for protection screening, and USCG's role in repatriating migrants who do not meet the protection standard. Separately, CRCL investigated the roles of USCIS and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in OVS.

### Investigation

CRCL reviewed USCG policies and practices regarding maritime interdictions generally, as well as specifically to OVS. CRCL received multiple briefings from USCG leadership and other federal and local government entities involved in OVS operations. CRCL also conducted two onsite investigations aboard USCG cutters to observe migrant interdictions, including the conditions for migrants aboard the cutters, and interviewing USCG personnel and interdicted migrants. On March 14, 2023, CRCL issued an Action Memorandum, requesting the USCG take immediate action to address language access issues, conditions aboard the cutters, medical care, and migrant tracking.

Following issuance of the Action Memorandum, USCG took many positive steps to address CRCL's concerns, such as increasing the frequency and quantity of food provided to migrants, increasing the number of Haitian-Creole interpreters, and installing satellite-based broadband internet on cutters to improve language access and migrant tracking. However, three areas required additional action: medical staffing, infectious disease screening, and screening of migrant children.

### Recommendations

On April 18, 2024, CRCL sent USCG a Recommendation Memorandum with six recommendations regarding medical staffing, infectious disease screening, and screening of unaccompanied minors. On August 26, 2024, USCG concurred with three recommendations and partially concurred with three. USCG partially concurred with CRCL's recommendation to deploy additional medical personnel and to assess the optimal allocation of those clinical assets. USCG also concurred with CRCL's recommendation to ensure the Human Trafficking questionnaire is provided in a private setting with appropriate language services. USCG stated that it is working with DHS Science and Technology and private industry to explore mobile translation devices to reinforce this practice.

*CRCL provides the public with documents related to complaint investigations. After it has been prepared and reviewed, CRCL will post a redacted version of this Recommendation Memorandum on our [website](#) that will contain additional information about the complaint investigation and CRCL's findings and recommendations.*