

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 6, 2019

The Honorable Kevin K. McAleenan
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary McAleenan,

Thousands of families and unaccompanied children are fleeing violence, corruption, and extreme poverty in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador to legally claim asylum in the United States. However, illegally reprogramming federal funds intended for our servicemembers to build a wasteful border wall, cutting humanitarian aid to the Northern Triangle, or threatening to shut down our southern border will cause a range of other catastrophic issues and fail to address this humanitarian crisis in any way.

Instead, this humanitarian crisis requires a humanitarian response. To that end, we believe that you should immediately increase communication and coordination among federal, state, local, and tribal governments as well as non-governmental stakeholders to promote the well-being and safety of migrant families, process asylum seeker claims more quickly, efficiently use federal and non-federal resources, and ensure that the DHS can meet its national security mission.

Federal Crisis Coordinator

DHS has the capacity, expertise, experience, and responsibility to coordinate responses to humanitarian crises. Similar to how DHS has responded to past humanitarian issues, we urge you to appoint a federal crisis coordinator who will lead an office responsible for managing federal humanitarian aid operations at the southern border.

We are encouraged by DHS's April 2, 2019 announcement that Manuel "Manny" Padilla would lead an Interagency Border Emergency Cell to improve information sharing and coordinate interagency support.^[1] However, since Secretary Nielsen has resigned, we have not heard any update about what this cell will be responsible for, what resources will be at its

^[1] Department of Homeland Security. April 2019. *Secretary Nielsen Convenes Border Crisis Meeting, Taps Manuel Padilla to Coordinate Interagency Border Emergency Cell*. See: <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/04/02/secretary-nielsen-convenes-border-crisis-meeting-taps-manuel-padilla-coordinate>

disposal, or even whether this entity will continue under your leadership. At the moment, it appears that this cell is insufficient to adequately coordinate the response to the humanitarian crisis. Please explain what Mr. Padilla's role will be moving forward and with what resources you will provide him to do his job.

We urge you to ensure that any federal crisis coordinator has a broad mandate to improve coordination between the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) along with state, local, and tribal governments as well as non-governmental stakeholders. It is imperative that the federal coordinator gather and analyze information from local officials to resolve logistical, personnel, and capacity issues as well as coordinate with and leverage state, local, tribal, and non-governmental resources. This is a complex, multi-jurisdictional problem that requires a centralized command and coordination structure.

Communication with Local Stakeholders

ICE and CBP drop-offs have stressed the resources of Arizonan localities, non-profits, and churches that are committed to helping asylum seekers transition to their final destinations in the United States and attend their court hearings. These groups have stepped up to provide food, housing, and transportation to asylum seekers whom ICE and CBP are dropping off in Yuma, Phoenix, and Tucson.

However, we continue to hear concerns from local elected officials and stakeholders about how the lack of communication from DHS officials undermines their ability to provide services. For example, these organizations often report that they lack timely notice about when these drop offs will occur. It is also our understanding that DHS is now releasing large numbers of asylum seekers in Yuma and Tucson, Arizona without properly communicating with Yuma, Phoenix, or Tucson stakeholders. This creates serious issues for migrant families, especially in smaller localities that lack adequate housing and transportation options for families trying to reach their final destinations.

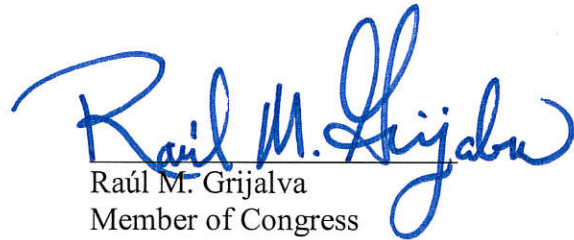
The volunteers who have dedicated their time and money to help asylum seekers and assist DHS in managing this crisis deserve better. We urge you to appoint local and regional coordinators to serve as primary points of contact for community groups and localities in order to strengthen communication and help address these issues and many more. Lastly, do you believe that FEMA has the authority to provide additional resources to reduce the burden on other DHS agencies, localities, and local groups who are overwhelmed by this crisis? If so, we strongly urge you to leverage these resources.

Thank you for your consideration of appointing a federal crisis coordinator for humanitarian aid on the southern border as well local coordinators to improve communication with local officials and stakeholders. We will continue to work with you on productive solutions to address the humanitarian crisis our southern border. We look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



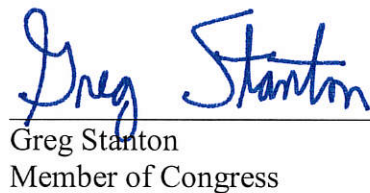
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