

## COALITION LETTER CALLS ON CONGRESS TO REJECT \$25 BILLION WALL RANSOM

February 14, 2018

Dear Senator,

We, the undersigned border community, civil rights and environmental organizations, call on Congress to secure permanent protections for Dreamers and reject proposals that would hold Dreamers hostage for a costly, damaging wall and reckless, unaccountable border enforcement.

President Trump's ill-considered decision to end DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, plunged 800,000 Dreamers into crisis. Now, his White House and some members of Congress are holding Dreamers hostage in a cynical attempt to further militarize our southern border communities. Members of Congress must consider policies that are driven by data and analysis, not rhetoric and hyperbole, respect the rule of law, and prioritize and strengthen accountability, oversight and transparency of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents.

Ongoing policy negotiations in Washington, D.C., that threaten to further increase border militarization through such provisions as more physical barriers, intrusive technologies, and Border Patrol agents, are unnecessary, wasteful, and against the wishes of those who actually live in border communities. In fact, [30 border cities, counties and tribal governments](#), have passed resolutions against building more walls. A path forward must include strong accountability and transparency measures, respect the rule of law, and reflect the views and needs of the 15 million people who call the southern borderlands home.

**The border wall has not been justified by any meaningful data. It treats the border as a place of confrontation, rather than a place of encounter, and serves as a global symbol of intolerance without a clear benefit.**

While Trump's border wall may appease his base, it would do nothing to improve public safety. In fact, it would weaken current efforts. As Ron Nixon of the *New York Times* [revealed](#) "The Trump administration would cut or delay funding for border surveillance, radar technology, patrol boats and customs agents in its upcoming spending plan to curb illegal immigration — all proven security measures that officials and experts have said are more effective than building a wall along the Mexican border."

Similarly, Trump's request for thousands more Border Patrol agents won't improve security or safety, and the Office of Inspector General [decried](#) the department's lack of planning and justification for expansion. Since 2004, there has been a significant downward trend in border crossings, making additional agents unnecessary and potentially a risk for the department, given the level of corruption in the agency. Indeed, the average agent apprehends only two migrants a month.

**Trump's border wall would be deeply destructive to the environment and the quality of life in border communities.**

Construction would guarantee excess flooding, [private property seizures](#), devastating environmental damage, disrespect Native American rights, and draw resources away from urgently needed infrastructure – including schools, roads, and health clinics.

That's why the Department of Homeland Security will [waive dozens of applicable laws](#) to enable its wall building – including the the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Endangered Species Act – so that statutory protections enjoyed elsewhere in the country can be swept aside without any assessment of impact or cost-benefit analysis.

There are nearly one hundred wildlife refuge tracts along the river in the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas. Since 1979, the Department of Interior has worked to create a corridor of forested habitat along the last 275 miles of the Rio Grande, an area of tremendous plant and animal diversity, including 19 endangered, threatened and protected species. Trump's wall would devastate these refuge areas – dividing the sanctuary in half; cutting access between the river and the forest; and adding air, traffic, and light pollution. As noted above, 20 cities and counties along the border have issued resolutions rejecting the border wall.

CBP and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) are facing renewed scrutiny and criticism over missteps and overreaches from their agents. Orr Yakobi, an Israeli DACA-recipient and UC San Diego student, was [detained](#) by CBP, then ICE for nearly a week, after his friend took a wrong turn and drove into Mexico — for under a minute. After several days in detention, Yakobi was released but faces immigration court proceedings. Transportation checks on buses and trains have drawn outrage, including in the [National Review](#).

**Border enforcement measures must be rooted in data – not politics – and ensure the safety of our residents. They should help us, not harm us.**

In the southwestern United States, Border Patrol (a component of CBP) operates 137 interior checkpoints up to a full 100 air miles inside the country and away from the actual border. According to a November 2017 [GAO report](#), Border Patrol is mostly catching U.S. citizens with small amounts of marijuana that would otherwise be legal in California and elsewhere. What is more concerning is that they are using close to 10 percent of their total agent time to do this, raising the question of why the agency needs more resources when it seems to have drifted away from the actual border and away from its mission, and instead is operating as an unchecked domestic law enforcement agency.

CBP is the largest law enforcement agency in the country, yet lacks vital transparency and accountability mechanisms like body-worn cameras that are central to 21st century policing. The

agency has a troubled track record of excessive force, racial profiling, and sexual assault in its ranks, yet officers and agents are rarely disciplined as a recent [20/20 report](#) makes clear. Instead of repeating the mistake of last decade, when the Border Patrol expanded so quickly that hiring standards were cast aside and its mission was [compromised](#) by corruption and abuses, CBP should get its current house in order.

Meanwhile, CBP agents routinely destroy life-sustaining aid, including water and food, left in the Arizona desert for migrants. A report from No More Deaths and La Coalición de Derechos Humanos revealed the destruction, citing a 37-year-old Mexican border crosser named Miguel: “They break the bottles so you can’t even use them to fill up in the tanks. I needed water, some of the other people in the group needed water, but we found them destroyed. [I felt] helplessness, rage. They [the US border patrol] must hate us.”

**The American public, from elected officials to borderland residents, wants Congress to reject the border wall**

[Recent polls](#) from Quinnipiac, Pew, ABC News/Washington Post, CNN and CBS all found that approximately 6 out of 10 Americans oppose the construction or expansion of a border wall.

Members of Congress from the border region continually voice [skepticism](#) regarding President Trump’s border wall and favor other border enforcement measures, akin to the bipartisan Sens. Coons-McCain proposal and the Reps. Hurd-Aguilar proposal: “A more narrowly drawn bill backed by San Antonio Republican Will Hurd, who represents a heavily Latino border district in West Texas, calls for enhancing border security technology and surveillance, as opposed to a physical barrier,” [San Antonio Express-News reports](#).

With President Trump’s decision to end DACA, it’s now up to Members of Congress to pass legislation for Dreamers to keep them where they belong – at home in the United States. Rewarding Trump’s offensive \$25 billion border wall ransom - and holding Dreamers’ futures hostage - would affront American values and irreparably harm millions of borderland residents.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers in Action  
America's Voice  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Arab American Institute  
Asian Americans Advancing Justice  
Black Immigrant Collective  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Center for Popular Democracy  
Church World Service  
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)

Daily Kos  
Earthjustice  
Equality California  
El Centro de Igualdad y Derechos  
Friends of the Earth  
Green For All  
Green Latinos  
Hip Hop Caucus  
Hispanic Federation  
Indivisible  
Mi Familia Vota  
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)  
National Center for Lesbian Rights  
National Center for Transgender Equality  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Domestic Workers Alliance  
National Education Association  
National Immigration Law Center  
National Korean American Service & Education Consortium  
National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health  
National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
Navigate MN  
People's Action United Farm Workers  
People Demanding Action  
Power Shift Network  
Sierra Club  
South Asian Americans Leading Together  
Southern Border Communities Coalition  
United Farm Workers  
United We Dream  
We Belong Together