



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2020

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Mark A. Morgan
Chief Operating Officer and
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Wolf and Mr. Morgan:

We are writing to urge you to immediately reverse plans to deploy additional Department of Homeland Security (DHS) personnel from across the United States to the southwest border. This proposed deployment would unnecessarily put the lives of federal employees at risk from COVID-19 while potentially straining already overwhelmed local health resources.

We are concerned by reports that Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO) is being directed to provide 810 Officers to work at Border Patrol checkpoints and monitor border surveillance cameras in the Rio Grande Valley and Laredo Sectors for two 60-day deployments. We have also been informed that Air and Marine Operations, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Department of Defense personnel are expected to be deployed to the two sectors in addition to the OFO deployment. While Border Patrol Agents have been encountering increasing numbers of migrants over the last month, the number remains a fraction of those encountered over the past year.

The Rio Grande Valley and Laredo sectors are experiencing a spike in COVID-19 cases, and hospitals in the area are approaching full capacity. It is irresponsible to send additional federal employees from across the country into a such an environment. These officers will be traveling, sharing vehicles, and staying in hotels in areas with rising COVID-19 infections. This deployment increases the risk of COVID-19 for these officers, the local public, and the officers' home ports and communities upon their return.

Unfortunately, six CBP port employees and one Border Patrol Agent have already passed away from COVID-19, and 1,355 CBP personnel have tested positive. It is critical that DHS and CBP

prioritize the health and safety of its workforce, their families, and the local communities. This must include immediately reversing dangerous plans to deploy additional DHS personnel to the southwest border. We also encourage DHS and CBP to implement policies that allow for more social distancing in the workplace, particularly in areas with surging COVID-19 infections, and provide opportunities for employees to work from home while fulfilling mission requirements.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman



Kathleen M. Rice
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Border Security,
Facilitation, and Operations