

**Statement of Deputy Assistant Secretary Emily Mendrala
for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs
Before the
Subcommittee on Border Security,
Facilitation, and Operations hearing entitled, “Examining the Court-Ordered
Reimplementation of the Remain in Mexico Policy”
March 2, 2022 at 2p.m.**

Chairwoman Barragán, Ranking Member Higgins, and Members of the Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations Subcommittee – thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. As Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs at the State Department, I am honored to have this opportunity to discuss the Department’s role in the implementation of the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP).

This year marks the bicentennial of bilateral relations between the United States and Mexico. Our two governments share deep commitments to humane and orderly migration, transnational security, and economic prosperity in the Western Hemisphere. The Biden-Harris Administration has repeatedly stated that MPP has endemic flaws, imposes unjustifiable human costs, and pulls resources and personnel away from other priority efforts. As the appeals process continues, we are working closely with the Government of Mexico in accordance with the court order requiring us to make good-faith efforts toward re-implementing MPP.

On December 2, 2021, the Government of Mexico publicly announced its independent decision to accept individuals returned from the United States to Mexico under the re-implementation of MPP. The U.S. government announced measures to mitigate safety and protection risks to MPP enrollees – addressing humanitarian concerns also shared by the Government of Mexico. The U.S. government leveraged the State Department’s expertise supporting humanitarian programs to make available relevant support to MPP returnees in Mexico as we do for vulnerable migrants or asylum seekers. The Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) supports ongoing programming through humanitarian partners in Mexico for shelter, legal orientation programs, psychosocial services, access to Wi-Fi, and other support for which all vulnerable migrants, including MPP enrollees, are eligible. PRM is also supporting access to COVID-19 testing for MPP migrants within three days prior to arrival at a POE to re-enter the United States to attend court.

In the previous implementation of MPP, some MPP enrollees were preyed upon by criminal groups upon reentry to Mexico. To mitigate this risk, State/PRM is supporting facilitation of humane transportation for MPP enrollees in Mexico between shelters and ports of entry. Our international organization partner provides this transport assistance. Return times are coordinated to minimize travel within Mexico after dark or before sunrise. The Government of Mexico provides security escorts for transports to further minimize risks.

In negotiations with Mexico, we arranged for a dignified and organized reception in Mexico where Mexican authorities immediately provide MPP enrollees with documentation upon arrival that allows them access to local services and permission to work legally in the country. PRM international organization partners provide assistance to ensure access to local services based on eligibility as determined by the Government of Mexico.

As we continue to work closely with the Government of Mexico in accordance with the court order, the Administration maintains that MPP contains endemic flaws, imposes unjustifiable human costs, and pulls resources and personnel away from other priority efforts. The United States and Mexico share an interest in sustainable solutions that humanely reduce irregular migration and forced displacement in, from, and through the region. This requires a comprehensive long-term approach that works to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement while simultaneously enhancing collaborative, regional approaches to expand access to international protection and other legal migration pathways and to humanely manage unprecedented mixed migration flows through consistent border enforcement, visa regimes, and other tools.

Madame Chairwoman, Ranking Member, and Members of the Border Security, Facilitation, and Operations Subcommittee – thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.