

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER HENRY CUELLAR (D-TX)
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
Committee on Homeland Security

Hearing on
“Border Security and Enforcement – Department of Homeland Security’s
Cooperation with State and Local Law Enforcement Stakeholders”
May 3, 2011

I am pleased that the Subcommittee is examining the Department of Homeland Security's cooperation with state and local law enforcement on border security and immigration enforcement matters today.

In my congressional district along the U.S.-Mexico border, cooperation among federal, state, and local law enforcement on border security matters is an everyday occurrence.

Whether as part of initiatives like the Border Enforcement Security Taskforce (BEST) or in the course of carrying out their regular law enforcement duties, local police and sheriffs' departments work alongside the Texas Department of Public Safety and federal agencies such as ICE, Border Patrol, and DEA on a regular basis.

These law enforcement agencies understand that the way to meaningful border security is to work together to combat the cartels, smugglers, and criminal elements who seek to do us harm.

Indeed, Laredo, Texas is home to the first Border Enforcement Security Taskforce, an ICE-led initiative to identify, disrupt, and dismantle criminal organizations posing significant threats to border security.

Today there are 21 BESTs on the northern and southern borders, including a BEST team in Mexico City.

My understanding is that these BEST teams are doing remarkable work.

From an operational standpoint, BEST teams are able to share critical information real-time on account of their working environment, which is in very close proximity to one another.

Teams comprised of personnel from ICE, CBP, ATF, DEA, FBI, various sheriff's departments, local police, Mexican Secretaria de Seguridad Publica, or SSP, etc. usually work together in the same building or facility.

The BEST initiative has also allowed for foreign law enforcement agencies to share sensitive investigative information rapidly and without delay, thereby helping to ensure the safety of the men and women who work tirelessly protecting our borders each and every day.

These taskforces have had a great deal of success, resulting in more than: 5,200 criminal arrests, 7,200 administrative arrests, 12,000 pounds of cocaine, 300 pounds of heroin, 300,000 pounds of marijuana, 2,800 pounds of ecstasy, 1,800 pounds of meth, 400 weapons, 455,000 rounds of ammunition, 1,500 vehicles, and \$42.5 million in currency.

Further, state and local elements of each BEST team are critical to the success of this program.

Beyond providing imperative uniformed assets and a marked police presence, which are extremely helpful and necessary during arrest operations, search warrant operations, traffic stops, high risk situations, etc., additional prosecutorial resources are highly beneficial.

The work of ICE and its partners is to be commended.

In recognition of the success of this program, I introduced H.R. 915, a bill to codify the BEST program in law to help ensure the program continues its good work.

The legislation is named after ICE agent and BEST member Jaime Zapata, who gave his life in the line of duty while in Mexico earlier this year.

Chairman Miller has indicated her strong support of the BEST program, and I look forward to working with her on this important bill.

I would also like to highlight the important supporting role that state and local law enforcement play in the federal government's border security efforts.

Often these local officers are the first line of defense when it comes to border-related criminal activity.

Without their efforts, the border, and people living in our border communities, would not be as secure.