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Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety
Committee on Homeland Security
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Good morning, Chairman Green, and members of the Committee on Homeland Security. My name is Steven McCraw; I am the Director of the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and our mission is to protect and serve Texas. Thank you for travelling to the border region of our state to talk to our citizens, community leaders and members of local law enforcement who possess firsthand knowledge about the ongoing border crisis.

It is our assessment that the most significant public safety and homeland security threat to Texas and the nation is an unsecured international border with Mexico. I have testified on this issue before Congressional committees eleven times since becoming the Director of DPS, and each report has been grimmer than the last. Unfortunately, that trend continues today and the reason is simple: The federal government has failed to do its Constitutional duty and secure the border. This failure comes at the detriment of our citizens and the benefit of the Mexican Cartels.

In my 2018 Congressional testimony I stated that crime was increasingly transitory, transnational, organized, and discreet. I reported that terrorism had become more disaggregated, and that an unsecured international border with Mexico represented a grave national security vulnerability. Our southern border was porous back then. Our southern border is porous now. This provides the Mexican Cartels a reliable means to smuggle people, some of whom are members of transnational gangs, criminal aliens or foreign nationals from countries hostile toward America.

I also testified that the Mexican Cartels have exploited the porous U.S./Mexico border to dominate our nation's lucrative illicit drug market, working closely with transnational and U.S.-based gangs to support their criminal operations on both sides of the U.S./Mexico Border, and they provide a readily available retail distribution chain for their drugs.

At the 2018 Congressional hearing, we warned that if Texas were to see a repeat of what occurred in 2014, U.S. Border Patrol agents will again be overwhelmed with detaining, transporting, and processing large numbers of individuals through federal immigration procedures. A surge of unaccompanied children and family units into Texas resulted in over 300,000 apprehensions of illegal migrants for calendar year 2014. These large numbers overwhelmed the U.S. Border Patrol and Texas communities. We witnessed how a scenario in which droves of individuals seeking asylum at the U.S./Mexico border resulted in substantial security gaps along the border.

In 2018, policymakers were more concerned about the possibility of a mass migration event at our border as a consequence of a failed state in the Western Hemisphere or a catastrophic event. Nobody considered that a global mass migration event could be the result of U.S. policies; however, there is now compelling evidence that because the federal government incentivized – rather than criminalized – illegal migration, crime and disorder have followed.

In calendar year 2021, there were more than 1.3 million apprehensions in Texas, which is 1 million more apprehensions than what occurred in 2014. And, in calendar year 2022 there were more than 1.4 million apprehensions in Texas. These numbers do not include the many known and unknown *got-a-ways*.

In our profession it is the absence of crime and disorder that defines success, and the border crisis has increased the difficulty of doing so in every community throughout the state and nation.

In Texas, Governor Greg Abbott and our state legislature care deeply about protecting its people and have appropriated billions of dollars in state funds to support the mission of the U.S. Border Patrol and its Agents. To continue addressing the border crisis in full force, Governor Abbott has made border security an emergency item for the legislative session occurring in Austin right now. The Governor is working with members of the legislature to:

- Secure \$4.6 billion to bolster border security efforts
- Pass legislation making it at least a ten-year mandatory minimum jail sentence for anyone caught smuggling in Texas
- Enhance the minimum penalty for operating stash houses to a third degree felony
- Enhance criminal penalties for foreign terrorist organizations and increase intelligence operations against such organizations.

Nobody has done more to secure the southern border with Mexico than Governor Abbott. His leadership on this issue should be your example. Texas is a law-and-order state and the people of Texas overwhelming support the U.S. Military, law enforcement and the rule of law and they want meaningful action, not excuses. The state of Texas does not need the permission of the federal government to protect its citizens from transnational threats and it will continue to do so by working closely with our local and federal partners to address the ongoing border crisis.

In March 2021, Governor Abbott launched Operation Lone Star (OLS) to deter, detect and interdict transnational criminal activity using all available state resources as part of a fully integrated, multidisciplinary strategy to address security lapses at the border. Thousands of National Guard Soldiers, Texas State Troopers, DPS Special Agents, Texas Rangers, DPS Tactical Teams and Texas Game Warden personnel were deployed to the border region to conduct around-the-clock patrol operations on the river, in the brush, on the roadways and in the air in smuggling corridors.

Importantly, Texas Border Sheriffs and Chiefs of Police serve on the front line in protecting their communities and OLS provided them much needed funding to address the border crisis in their communities.

Infrastructure and technology are also vital to securing something as vast and diverse as the Texas/Mexico border. Governor Abbott enlisted the Texas Facilities Commission to continue work on a permanent wall at identified hot spots. These projects are complex and implementing them takes time. In the interim, the Texas National Guard has worked with Texas landowners and communities along the border to install temporary fencing to deter crossings on private property. The temporary fencing (such as cyclone fencing), concertina wire or Conex boxes also serve as notice that those who cross over these barriers are subject to state criminal trespassing charges.

Governor Abbott designated the Mexican Cartels as Terrorist Organizations and directed that DPS Special Agents and Analysts conduct stateside criminal enterprise investigations targeting the command-and-control elements of the Mexican Cartels operating throughout Texas working closely with DEA, FBI and HSI in cities throughout Texas.

Another key element of the OLS strategy includes Texas' Anti-Gang Center Program that funds centers located throughout the state where there is a prevalence of gang activity. The Mexican Cartels work closely with these gangs that support cartel smuggling and trafficking operations and the gangs are also involved in the retail distribution of the drugs. The TAG Centers provide a venue to collocate local, state and federal gang enforcement, analytical, investigative and prosecutorial resources to maximize the impact on violent gang activity and dismantle gang networks working with the Mexican Cartels.

Other state agencies also play a key role such as the Texas Department of Criminal Justice which has provided jail space and transportation to address the many OLS related arrests. The Texas Department of Emergency Management continues to provide valuable support to local and state agencies as well.

I am submitting for today's record a table which contains some of the OLS activity numbers. Of note is the over 360 million lethal doses of fentanyl that were seized by DPS and more than 19 tons of methamphetamine. Moreover, members of the Texas National Guard, Texas Game Wardens and DPS personnel have detained and turned over 350,000 illegal migrants to Border Patrol that would have otherwise been *got-a-ways*.

Again, thank you for taking the time to travel to the Texas/Mexico border to witness the crisis for yourself and speaking with local experts and citizens who live and work here. This is a beautiful part of our state, or rather our country. The federal government owes it to the people who live here to do their job and secure the border. These communities and our state is doing everything possible to maintain the rule of law, protect human life, and protect property. All of this comes at great expense and sacrifice.