

**Testimony of Dr. Alexander Tenorio, MD,
UC San Diego Health Neurological Surgery Resident, to the U.S. House Committee on
Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Border Security and Enforcement and the
Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Accountability Examining the Impact of
the Border Wall**

July 18, 2023 - Washington, DC

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairmen Higgins and Bishop, Ranking Members Correa and Ivey, and Members of the subcommittees. It is an honor to testify before you today about the humanitarian toll and economic burden imposed by increasing border wall heights across the southern region.

My name is Alexander Tenorio and I am a 4th year neurological surgery resident at UC San Diego Health. As part of my duties, I treat patients with neurological conditions. This involves injury to the brain and spinal cord, which often require emergent and life-saving treatment of devastating injuries. This includes traumatic injuries that occur after border falls. I have been at the frontlines, and witness to the devastation that the raised border wall causes every single day.

During my tenure at UC San Diego, my trauma colleagues and I have observed an unrelenting increase in traumatic injuries as a result of border falls. We were the first institution to describe this phenomenon and have published several peer-reviewed articles in academic journals detailing this emerging public health crisis.

Significant Findings

Our research shows that since the U.S.-Mexico border wall was raised up to thirty feet, there have been a record number of traumatic injuries from border falls. Hospital admissions from border falls in California have increased almost 10 times compared to 2016.

Not only has the frequency increased, but the severity of injuries and mortality have risen significantly, with 16 deaths after the border wall was raised compared to 0 deaths prior. We are also now seeing more severe injuries to the spine, brain, and even the brain's blood vessels, which are otherwise uncommon and can only result from high impact trauma. These are injuries that will leave people unable to work and care for their families. Research from colleagues in Texas also shows significant increases in border trauma hospital admissions, indicating that this issue can be seen across the Southern Border region where the border wall height has also been raised.

In addition to the profound human cost, there has been an increased economic burden to our healthcare system. Our hospital costs have increased by 636% from \$11 million prior to the border height increase to \$72 million afterwards.

These are young individuals with families escaping violent threats, untenable economic conditions, and political upheaval. I am reminded of one of my patients, a 25-year-old man who had suffered a severe fracture to the spine that would require surgery. He was a farm laborer who had lost his job and his home. He was unemployed, living in the streets with his wife and young daughter. He came to the U.S. to escape extreme poverty and to feed his family.

While he laid on a stretcher in our trauma bay, I could sense his fear and despair. He was now in another country being held in custody with a severe injury. As I described to him his injury and that he would need surgery, his response wasn't about whether he would be able to walk again. He responded, *"Cuando voy a salir del hospital para ver a mi familia?" When will I leave the hospital to see my family?*

Now, I ask the subcommittees to consider the following: Do you believe this individual risked his life, left his family, and climbed that 30-foot barrier due to trivial circumstances?

As the son of a father who escaped violent threats in his hometown as a teenager and now a first-hand witness to these stories, I can assure you that these people that I care for are searching for the same things that my parents did and that we all do: safety, security and a chance for a better life for their children.

Conclusion

Ultimately, these raised border walls have resulted in a record number of traumatic injuries, increased severity and mortality, and increased economic burden to our hospital systems.

As a neurosurgeon, I must reveal this untold human suffering and strain on financially strapped hospital systems to our nation. I fear this trend will only get worse without any current system in place to analyze the full extent of the humanitarian and economic costs of border infrastructure policies to help determine sensible alternative solutions.

Thank you to both Subcommittees for inviting me to testify today, and I hope the Subcommittees do all within their power to recognize the harms of the border wall on human lives and our hospital systems.

Respectfully submitted by:
Dr. Alexander Tenorio, MD

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Attached:

CV of Dr. Alexander Tenorio, MD