

**DESTROYING AMERICA'S BEST IDEA:
BIDEN'S BORDER CRISIS,
DESECRATING NATIONAL PARK LANDS
AND DAMAGING COMMUNITIES**

OVERSIGHT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON DESTROYING
AMERICA'S BEST IDEA:
BIDEN'S BORDER CRISIS, DESECRATING
NATIONAL PARK LANDS
AND DAMAGING COMMUNITIES**

**Thursday, June 13, 2024
U.S. House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC**

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11 a.m. in Room 1334, Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Paul Gosar [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Gosar, Rosendale, Hunt, Westerman; and Stansbury.

Also Present: Representatives Tiffany, Kiggans, Malliotakis and D'Esposito.

Dr. GOSAR. The Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations will come now to order.

Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Subcommittee at any time.

The Subcommittee is meeting today to hear testimony on destroying America's best idea: Biden's border crisis, desecrating national park lands and damaging communities.

Under Committee Rule 4(f), any oral opening statements at the hearing are limited to the Chairman and the Ranking Member. I, therefore, ask unanimous consent that all other Members' statements be made part of the hearing record if they are submitted in accordance with Committee Rule 3(o).

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the following Members be allowed to sit and participate today in today's hearing: the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Tiffany; the gentlewoman from Virginia, Ms. Kiggans; the gentlewoman from New York, Ms. Malliotakis; and the gentleman from New York, Mr. D'Esposito.

Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF THE HON. PAUL GOSAR, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF ARIZONA**

Dr. GOSAR. Good morning, everyone. I first would like to take a moment to say thank you to our witnesses for your travel. Thank you for coming before the Committee today to discuss destroying America's best idea, Biden's border crisis, desecrating national park lands and damaging communities.

Last September, Chairman Westerman and I visited New York City in the wake of Mayor Adams, a Democrat, predicting that the

massive increase in migrants was destroying the city. After being denied a tour of the processing center, we visited Floyd Bennett Field with local elected officials, as well as representatives from the National Park Service. An agreement to lease the site, which sits on National Park Service land, had just been signed between the City of New York and the National Park Service. Local residents, local elected officials, and even law enforcement repeatedly vocalized their concerns for the wrongly reached plan to house thousands of migrants on one of the largest green spaces in New York City.

We asked all kinds of questions about safety and security for both the employees and the migrants themselves. All of our concerns were ignored, as at this time the focus was simply on housing more people at any cost, no matter what rules needed to be bent. Here we are, 9 months later. All the problems we predicted have come to pass. Let's quickly tick through them. Crime in the local area has gone up. Stress on local and park law enforcement has increased. Local citizens have experienced reduced access to green spaces. Even the migrant population at the camp itself is not safe. During a winter storm last year, the migrants had to be evacuated to a local high school, which caused the students to miss school.

Above all, building this camp did nothing to resolve the overall issue of reducing the number of illegal immigrants coming to the New York City seeking shelter. The Biden administration's misguided immigration policies are at the heart of these issues. Since the beginning of this Administration, President Biden has rolled back many of the policies that helped reduce the number of illegal aliens coming through our border and entering our cities.

Just yesterday, suspected terrorists with ISIS ties were arrested by ICE in New York City and several other cities. The men were migrants who had crossed the southern border just last year. The Border Patrol has lost nearly a quarter of its workforce since October 2020. Twice as many agents have chosen to retire early, compared to the Obama and Trump administrations. One agent even commented that "The Administration is so bad for morale that I am not trying to be political, I am just speaking the facts. It has become political. Catch and release is demoralizing the agents."

In fact, the situation has gotten so bad during President Biden's time in office that President Biden himself is now desperately attempting to reverse this course and limit asylum claims with an Executive Order. But this action comes a little too late and further supports this Committee's conviction that housing migrants on national park land is neither an appropriate use of the nation's most treasured places, nor does it address the Biden administration's border crisis.

The Committee is thoroughly investigating the Biden administration's decision to lease Floyd Bennett Field, and has issued requests for document productions, held briefings, conducted interviews involving several Federal entities involving the Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Department of Homeland Security, and the Executive Office of the President. The Committee will continue to move forward with this investigation until the

Biden administration not only commits to a rapid demobilization plan for the camp at Floyd Bennett Field, but also acknowledges their mistakes in creating this precedent.

America's national parks are called our nation's best idea. The National Park Service mission is to "preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations." Housing migrants at National Park Service lands sets a dangerous precedent that, left unchecked, could expand into either public lands and national parks, transforming the legacy of a park system from one of natural beauty to a pay-for-play system, prioritizing migrants over our shared national and cultural history.

The Floyd Bennett Field lease expires in September. The Biden administration has so far remained silent about its future plans for the migrant camp at Floyd Bennett Field. However, I want to make sure we are clear about this. The lease must end, and it will in January.

I am now recognizing the Ranking Member for her opening statement.

STATEMENT OF THE HON. MELANIE A. STANSBURY, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO

Ms. STANSBURY. All right. Good morning, everyone, and thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome our witnesses who have traveled to be here today.

This is the sixth hearing that the House Natural Resources Committee has had on the topic of immigration, and it is the fourth meeting that we have had in this Subcommittee. I want to remind my colleagues that this is the Natural Resources Committee, not the Homeland Security Committee.

And this is also the second hearing in a row in which the Republican leadership of this Committee has invited a witness who is an active candidate running for Congress. So, I want to just remind my colleagues that our taxpayer dollars are not to be used for political purposes or as a campaign stop for political activities.

And in addition to that, I think it is worth noting that this Committee was originally scheduled for earlier in the morning, but was rescheduled so that Donald Trump could meet with House Republicans off campus for a political rally this morning.

So, here we are, in spite of all of that, having an immigration hearing this morning in the House Natural Resources Committee under the pretense of concern about a Federal lease on public lands. But I guess my question is, if folks are so concerned about Federal leases, why did they not raise their voices when Donald Trump violated the Emoluments Clause of the Constitution and a Federal lease with the GSA so that he could use the National Post Office Building here on Pennsylvania Avenue to open a Trump Hotel and use it as a personal piggy bank during his presidency, as foreign governments spent millions of dollars at that hotel while they were meeting with him in the Oval Office with official business?

Furthermore, he used one of our greatest national parks for a Fourth of July campaign rally, even against the objections of the local tribes for whom it is a sacred place.

Or what about Attorney Barr using his authority to call park police and National Guard troops in to take public citizens out of Lafayette Park, which is also a public space in front of the White House, after he did not want them there protesting after the death of George Floyd?

Or when the Trump administration blasted through public lands and habitats to advance their various priorities around the development of natural resources?

And my question is, why didn't the leadership of this Committee raise their voices then?

And also, if we are so concerned about NEPA, which I am excited to hear that we are suddenly concerned about NEPA, why is it that they demanded, as part of the flesh of the negotiation over the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which they are now violating during their budget hearings, that we undermine the fundamentals of NEPA in order to keep the U.S. economy from shutting down?

So, I find it extremely ironic that we are here today in what appears to be more like a New York State or New York City Assembly meeting to talk about a park in New York, and the use of a small piece of an airstrip in this park for housing individuals who have come to this country to seek asylum.

So, what is this hearing actually about? Is it actually about public lands? Is it about NEPA? Or is it about using this Committee for campaign activities to advance a political agenda during a campaign year and to advance political candidates?

In fact, we tried to pass bipartisan immigration reform here in Congress just a few months ago. And the very gentlemen that these folks have been meeting with this morning told them to not support bipartisan immigration reform because it was a good issue for Donald Trump to campaign on.

So, I just find it very rich that we are sitting here this morning to talk about violations of Federal leases, of which there has been extremely lengthy due diligence to make sure that that did not occur. Talking about immigration, and demonizing immigrants who come to one of the greatest cities in the world, who has welcomed immigrants with open arms for literally centuries, and a Committee that does not have jurisdiction to work on these issues. So, I look forward to the conversation.

I do welcome our public officials for joining us today. This is the people's house. This is your house. But this is not a campaign stop.

With that, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I find it rich. I find our greatest natural resources are the people I am looking at, the people of this country. That is where we have something to do.

I would now like to introduce our witnesses. First, we have Ms. Jaime Williams, Assembly Member, 59th District, New York State Assembly; Mr. Paul King, President, Belle Harbor Property Owners Association; Ms. Amy Fischer, Director of Refugee and Migrant Rights, Amnesty International USA; Ms. Elizabeth Morrissey, President, Madison Marine Park Homecrest Civic Association—say that three times, a tongue twister.

Let me remind the witnesses that under Committee Rules, you must limit your oral statements to 5 minutes, but your entire statement will appear in the hearing record.

To begin your testimony, please press the “on” button so we can all hear you. It will stay green for the first 4 minutes, then it will turn yellow. When you see it red, kind of wrap it up.

I will now recognize Ms. Williams for her 5 minutes. Thank you for coming back.

STATEMENT OF JAIME WILLIAMS, ASSEMBLY MEMBER, 58TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Ms. WILLIAMS. Good morning, Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Melanie Stansbury, and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Jaime Williams, and I represent the 59th Assembly District in New York State.

Last September, without any input from the surrounding communities, National Park Service entered into an agreement with New York City to house migrants in tents at Floyd Bennett Field. No thought was put into how it would affect taxpaying New Yorkers who live and work in Marine Park, Mill Basin, Gerritsen Beach, Mill Island, the Rockaways, and other parts of the surrounding area. No care was given to how this would affect our already depleted police precinct, or how transportation would be affected, how the conditions of our park would be affected, what this would do to our local businesses with such an influx of 2,000 people meant for residents in the surrounding areas. No one making those decisions cared about the answers to those questions.

Over the last 9 months, we have seen the answers to those questions come to life. We see increased response time to crimes, overcrowded busses where fights break out amongst the migrants.

We see people illegally selling food in our streets with babies strapped to their backs, young school-aged children who, instead of being in class, are sitting on a median or walking in and out of traffic selling chocolate bars.

We see migrants begging at our doors and trying our door handles at all hours of the day and night.

We have seen migrants attempting to jump in front of cars; illegal, unlicensed, and unregistered scooters zooming in and out of traffic lanes carelessly.

We see residents unable to shop at our local stores without being harassed by the migrants, who are aggressively panhandling in our store parking lots.

We see our schools inundated by more students who rarely show up to class on time, disrupting the day for the children who are ready to learn and who are on time.

We have seen the conditions at our park deteriorate with garbage thrown everywhere, trash going into the waters after beach parties, children swimming in our waterways without any type of supervision where there are clearly “no swimming” signs, illegal unregistered cars parked all over our grassland area.

We have had fights breaking out where the security guards are running for their lives, a slashing and a strangulation within the confines of the base camp.

And let me make it clear: these are the events that we know about. Reports from the police officers and park police have stated that the staff at the compound are hiding what is happening in the base camp, oftentimes not calling it a criminal activity, and are unwilling to allow law enforcement into the tents.

The powers that be knew that this was a recipe for disaster. They knew that putting 2,000 people who claim they were desperate and seeking asylum in a different place of desperation was not going to go well. So, what did they do? They said that it was exaggerated by us, and when we asked the questions, they said that they will circle back.

The only thing that I can say to those who made those decisions is that we told you so. We told you that this was no place to house these individuals. We told you that this base camp would negatively affect communities and residents. We told you that it would affect our transportation and our quality of life.

The National Park Service mission is to preserve unimpaired natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. With garbage thrown about, old cars leaking into our grasslands, and dangerous e-bikes and scooters carelessly being placed and used on our park land evades that mission.

As we near the end of the lease, we are here again once more, and we ask that this lease not be renewed. We need to restore our national park and bring back the quality of life that the residents of the communities I serve deserve. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Williams follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAIME WILLIAMS, ASSEMBLYMEMBER, 59TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT, NEW YORK STATE

Good morning Chair Westerman, Ranking Member Melanie Stansbury and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me here today. My name is Jaime Williams and I represent the 59th Assembly District in New York State.

Last September, without any input from the surrounding communities, National Parks Service entered into an agreement with New York City to house migrants in tents at Floyd Bennett Field. No thought was put into how it would affect tax paying New Yorkers, who live and work in Marine Park, Mill Basin, Gerritsen Beach. Mill Island, the Rockaways and other parts of the surrounding area. No care was given to the how this would affect our already depleted police precincts; how our transportation would be affected; how the conditions of our park would be affected; what this would do to our local businesses or what an influx of 2000 people meant for residents in the surrounding areas. No one who was making those decisions cared about the answers to those questions.

Over the last nine months we have seen the answers to those questions come to life. We see increased response time to crimes, overcrowded buses where fights break out among the migrants. We see people illegally selling food in our streets with babies strapped to their backs, young school aged children who instead of being in class are sitting on a median or walking in and out of traffic selling chocolate bars. We see migrants begging at our doors and trying our door handles at all hours of the day and night. We have seen migrants attempting to jump in front of cars. Illegal, unlicensed and unregistered scooters zooming in and out of lanes of traffic carelessly. We see residents unable to shop at our local stores without being harassed by the migrants who are aggressively panhandling in our store parking lots. We see our schools inundated by more students, who rarely show up to class on time, disrupting the day for the children who come on time ready to learn.

We have seen the conditions at our park deteriorate with garbage strewn everywhere. Trash going into our waters after "beach" parties. Illegal unregistered cars parked all over our grassland area. We have had fights breaking out, where the security guards are running for their lives. A slashing and a strangulation within the confines of the basecamp. And let me make it clear. These are the events that

we know about. Reports from local police officers and park police have stated that the staff at the compound are hiding what is happening in the base camp, oftentimes not calling in criminal activity and are unwilling to allow law enforcement into the tents.

The powers that be knew that this was a recipe for disaster. They knew that putting 2000 people who claimed they were desperate and seeking asylum in a different place of desperation was not going to go well. So what do they do? They act like everything we are saying is exaggerated or tell us that they will “circle back to us” when we have a complaint and are looking for a resolution.

The only thing I can say to those who made this decision is we told you so. We told you that this was no place to house people. We told you that this basecamp would negatively affect the communities and residents. We told you that it would affect our transportation and our quality of life. We told you that housing 2000 people in tents in the middle of a field was a bad idea for everyone.

The National Park Service mission is to “preserve unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the National Park System for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.” With garbage strewn about, old cars leaking into our grasslands and dangerous ebikes and scooters carelessly being used in the Park, the agency has failed that mission.

As we near the end of the lease, we again say no more of this. This lease cannot be renewed. We need to restore our National Park, and bring back the quality of life that the residents of the communities I serve deserve.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much, Ms. Williams. I now recognize Mr. King for his 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF PAUL KING, PRESIDENT, BELLE HARBOR
PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION, BELLE HARBOR,
NEW YORK**

Mr. KING. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman, Ranking Member Stansbury, and members of the Committee. My name is Paul King. I am a long-time civic leader on the Rockaway Peninsula, which is just across Jamaica Bay from Floyd Bennett Field. I am currently President of the Belle Harbor Property Owners Association. I am also a member of Queens Community Board 14.

I am 60 years old, and I have lived every one of those years within 4 miles of Floyd Bennett Field. I use Floyd Bennett Field and Gateway National Recreation Area for youth sports, kayaking, biking, and camping.

Uninformed critics mock Floyd Bennett Field as just an old airport. And it is true, the Federal Government terribly neglects Floyd Bennett Field, Fort Tilden, and Charles Park. But the field and Jamaica Bay are wonderful, natural resources in our crowded boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens, where our citizens don't have a lot of space to enjoy nature.

From the moment Governor Kathy Hochul said she wanted a migrant camp in Floyd Bennett Field, people from across the political spectrum said it was a bad idea, a flat-out mistake: local civic associations, sports organizations, park advocates, and the legal aid society.

Indeed, my Congressman, Gregory Meeks, a Democrat, said putting a tent city in Floyd Bennett Field was a terrible idea, perhaps even inhumane. The Congressman knows that Floyd Bennett Field is exposed and cold in the winter. It is a floodplain that is susceptible to storm surges during hurricanes. It makes no sense. But the Congressman also said the migrant camp would not

happen because housing on a national park is against the law. He said only an emergency declaration by President Biden would make it legal. And Congressman Meeks was right. The camp is illegal. It directly violates the Act of Congress that created Gateway.

It is also a terrible place for people to live. We have had one big rainstorm, not a hurricane, not a big nor'easter, and the camp had to be evacuated. I mean, it seems that Floyd Bennett Field's only benefit is it is a place where Mayor Adams can hide the migrants far away from Manhattan.

Unfortunately, as Assemblywoman Williams was saying, all of the residual effects, the direct harm to our neighboring communities in Brooklyn and Rockaway, the things that we warned about, are coming true. Our neighborhoods are where New Yorkers live their American dream. Our parents and grandparents worked hard and sacrificed to create safe spaces for their children. We are doing the same for our children. But now crime and lawlessness are increasing in our communities.

Migrants on these illegal scooters not only weave in and out of traffic, they run through stop signs and red lights. They even fly down the sidewalks at high speed. They don't respect our laws or our safety. Aggressive panhandling, it is happening at schools and homes. Just last week, a migrant from Floyd Bennett Field was caught on video climbing onto a second floor terrace in Neponsit and trying to break into someone's house. Our retail stores are suffering from shoplifting and lost customers. We have migrants with small children not only standing in boulevard medians, they are out on the highway hawking fruit and drinks.

And the park itself is being damaged. The park is being damaged and dumped on. Our own working-class Americans are losing opportunities to earn money. And the list goes on. But almost all of this was predictable. And ladies and gentleman, the worst is yet to come.

Summertime, utilization of the parks spikes. The number of people who come to the beaches in Rockaway spikes, just as well. Thousands of extra people, including some of the folks who are proving to be bad guests, will flow into neighborhoods that have limited services and very little police presence. Similar to what the assemblywoman said, it is a recipe for disaster.

In September, hurricane season kicks in full force. The National Hurricane Center said this is going to be a bad year, with as many as four to seven major storms. Having literally been in the Atlantic Ocean during Sandy, I can tell you, you don't want to be in a tent a few feet above sea level when the big one hits.

Now, as you know, New York City and the National Park Service almost certainly will extend the lease this September. This is a mistake. It must not be allowed. It is bad for the migrants. It is bad for citizens. It is bad for our national park, and it is bad for our National Park System since the NPS Director's memo claiming this camp is consistent with the purpose of the park opens the door for every national park to be used as a migrant camp.

So, I ask the Committee to do everything in its power to provide relief to the citizens in Brooklyn and Queens, to make sure that this temporary camp doesn't become permanent, and to end the illegal lease in Floyd Bennett Field.

Thank you for your time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. King follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PAUL KING, PRESIDENT, BELLE HARBOR PROPERTY OWNERS ASSOCIATION

Good morning Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Stansbury and members of the committee.

My name is Paul King. I am a long-time civic leader on the Rockaway Peninsula which is across Jamaica Bay from Floyd Bennett Field. I currently president of the Belle Harbor Property Owners Association and a member of Queens CB14. I am 60 years old and have lived every one of those years within 4 miles of FBF. I use FBF and Gateway National Recreation Area for youth sports, kayaking, biking and camping.

Uninformed critics mock FBF as just an old airport. It is true the Federal government terribly neglects FBF . . . and Ft. Tidlen . . . and Charles Park, but the park and Jamaica Bay are wonderful natural assets for citizens in our crowded boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens.

From the moment Governor Kathy Hochul said she wanted a migrant camp in FBF, people from across the political spectrum said it was a mistake. Local civic associations, youth sports organizations, park advocates, the Legal Aid Society.

Indeed, my Congressman, Gregory Meeks, a Democrat said putting a tent city in FBF was a terrible idea, even inhumane. The Congressman knows that FBF is exposed and cold in the winter. It a flood plain that is susceptible to storm surges during hurricanes. It made no sense, but the Congressman also said the migrant camp would not happen because housing in a national park is against the law. He said only an emergency declaration by President Biden would make it legal.

And Congressman Meeks was right. This camp is illegal. It directly violates the Act of Congress that created Gateway. It is also a terrible place for people to live. We had one big rainstorm—not even a hurricane or Nor’easter—and the camp had to be evacuated.

Unfortunately, all of the residual effects we warned about—direct harm to our neighboring communities in Brooklyn and Rockaway—are coming true.

Our neighborhoods are where the American dream comes true in NYC. Our parents and grandparents worked hard and sacrificed to create safe places for their children. We do the same for our children.

- Now crime and lawlessness are increasing in our communities.
- Illegal scooters are rampant, damaging beaches in Floyd Bennett Field, weaving in and out of traffic on our roads, and even zipping at high speeds down sidewalks.
- Aggressive panhandling has included migrants coming onto people’s properties to demand money. In one case in Belle Harbor, a mother was just getting her children into the house after school when she was confronted by a migrant demanding money in her left.
- Just last week, a migrant from Floyd Bennett Field was captured on video, climbing onto a second-floor balcony in Neponset and trying to enter a home.
- Many of these migrant are just poor people trying to find a better life, but some are gang members, like the Venezuelan criminal from Tren de Aragua who shot two cops last week.
- Our retail stores are suffering.
- We have migrants with small children standing in the middle of highways trying to hawk fruit and chocolate.
- Our own working class and poor Americans are losing opportunities to earn money.

Almost all of this was predictable.

And, ladies and gentlemen, the worst is yet to come. In July and August, park utilization spikes as does beach usage in Rockaway. Thousands of extra people—including those who are proving to be bad guests—will flow into neighborhoods that have limited services and very little police presence. It is a recipe for disaster.

In September, hurricane season kicks in in full force. The NHC is predicting an above-normal hurricane season, with 4 to 7 major hurricanes. Having been literally in the Atlantic Ocean during Sandy, I can assure you that you do not want to be in a tent a few feet above sea level when a big one hits.

Sure, we can evacuate the migrants ahead of a hurricane, but to where? NYC does not have a clear evacuation plan. And if thousands of migrants take slots in the storm shelters, where will our citizens go?

As you know, NYC and the NPS can—and almost certainly will—extend the lease this September. This is a mistake. It must not be allowed. It's bad for the migrants. It's bad for our citizens. It's bad for our National Park.

And it is bad for our National Park System. The NPS Director's memo proclaiming his migrant camp is consistent with the purpose of the park, not only strains credulity; it opens the door to having migrant camps at every national park as long as rent is being paid and used for park improvements.

So I ask the committee to do everything in its power to provide relief to the citizens of Brooklyn and Queens. End this illegal lease in Floyd Bennett Field.

Thank you for your time.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. King. I now recognize Ms. Fischer for her 5 minutes.

**STATEMENT OF AMY FISCHER, DIRECTOR OF REFUGEE AND
MIGRANT RIGHTS, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA,
WASHINGTON, DC**

Ms. FISCHER. Thank you, Chair Gosar and Ranking Member Stansbury, for the opportunity to testify this morning.

Amnesty International is a Nobel Prize-winning global human rights organization committed to fighting for a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As the Director of Refugee and Migrant Rights at Amnesty International USA, I work to ensure the United States is upholding these human rights obligations, particularly Article 14, stating that everyone has the right to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution, and Article 25 establishing that everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, and necessary social services.

And while I am here today in my professional capacity, in my personal life I am a proud volunteer with Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid, an organization here in Washington, DC, made up of hundreds of volunteers, community organizations, and faith institutions that has welcomed thousands of newcomers to our community. I have spent my free time welcoming new arrivals off of busses, helping to fill out immigration applications, sorting and distributing donations, and delivering furniture and household goods to my new neighbors. And earlier this year, my family and I provided shelter in our home for an asylum-seeking family who was left on the winter streets by D.C.'s Office of Migrant Services that had a three-night shelter limit at the time. This 1-year-old girl and her sweet parents stayed in our home and became an extension of our family until they were able to move to an apartment of their own.

It is through this personal experience that I know the joy of welcoming people with dignity, and it is in my capacity as the Director of Refugee and Migrant Rights at Amnesty that I know that the United States has an obligation to do so under international law.

The situation in New York City was a perfect storm of high numbers of newcomers, exacerbated by Governor Abbott's bussing

program, and people arriving without existing resources in the United States. As New York City was struggling to respond to high numbers of new arrivals, there was a lack of focus on case management, housing, and job programs. Limited access to work permits and processing delays further exacerbated the issue by restricting people's ability to work and save money to move out of shelters and into permanent housing. This led to the shelter population outpacing capacity in New York City, and the city finding far more inaccessible places to shelter its new residents, like Floyd Bennett Field.

Alternatively, a coordinated reception system that meets the immediate and medium-term needs of people seeking safety would cut the chaos and dysfunction both at the border and the interior, while local communities reap the windfall benefits of new Federal funding avenues, spending power of new arrivals, and new tax revenue.

A recent study by the Department of Health and Human Services found that resettled refugees and asylees contributed billions more in Federal, state, and local government revenues than they received in services. Across the country, programs that provide case management, legal assistance, and social services have been proven to be cost effective, help people leave shelters into permanent housing, and ensure compliance with immigration requirements.

Specifically, Congress should robustly fund the Shelter and Services Program that provides financial support to local governments and community organizations to offer immediate reception services to new arrivals, expand the successful Case Management Pilot program, and create a destination reception fund to send Federal dollars to state, local, and tribal communities to build medium-term reception programs that promote self-sufficiency and bolster local capacity to ensure new and old community members have what they need to thrive.

I will close with the story of Carla, who fled Venezuela with her husband and two children to seek safety and security. When they arrived in Washington, DC in October 2022, they were provided shelter in a hotel room. Carla and her husband first found under-the-table work until they could pay an attorney and file for asylum. Finally, after saving up more money, they were able to move out of the shelter and into their new apartment in October 2023.

Carla benefited from welcoming services, but says she could have moved out of the shelter sooner with access to legal assistance, rental assistance, and case management. A licensed cosmetologist in Venezuela, Carla has opened a cosmetology business in her new home, and hopes to expand to hire workers and give back to her new community. This April, Carla filed taxes for the first time, and is putting her newly minted work permit to good use. And she is grateful to this country for all that it has given her.

People seeking safety don't damage our communities. They make them more vibrant and help our economies grow. I encourage Congress to invest in solutions that uphold the dignity and human rights of all of our communities, both those who have called the United States home for generations and those arriving to our borders with dreams. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Fischer follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF AMY FISCHER, DIRECTOR, REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS,
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA

On behalf of Amnesty International USA and our members and supporters in the United States, I am grateful to the Chair Gosar and Ranking Member Stansbury, for the invitation to provide testimony in the hearing entitled, “Destroying America’s Best Idea: Biden’s Border Crisis, Desecrating National Park Lands and Damaging Communities” on June 13, 2024.

Amnesty International is a Nobel Prize-winning global human rights organization committed to fighting for the human rights of all people—no matter who they are or where they are. Amnesty is the world’s oldest and largest global grassroots human rights organization, and as the U.S. section of the organization, we have members and activists in all 50 states. Our members are part of a larger global movement of 10 million people in 150 countries.

Our vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. On December 10, 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Article 14 of the UDHR states that everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. Enshrined in international and domestic law, the right to seek asylum is a bedrock of refugee protection. Under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, of which the United States was a key drafter, and its 1967 Protocol, the latter of which the U.S. incorporated into domestic law through the 1980 Refugee Act, governments must uphold the right to seek asylum. The U.S. government codified in domestic law the right to seek asylum both at and between ports-of-entry along the U.S. border.

Further, Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” That right extends to all people, regardless of their immigration status.

As the Director of Refugee and Migrant Rights at Amnesty International USA, a key aspect of my role is working to ensure the United States is upholding these human rights obligations regarding the treatment of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, both at its borders and within the interior of the U.S. And while I am here today in my professional capacity, the decision to leave someone’s home in order to seek safety is a deeply personal one. Like so many other Americans across the United States, my family came to the United States generations ago to seek protection from persecution. And in my personal capacity, I have committed myself to welcoming the new generation of people seeking safety, as I am also a proud co-founder and organizer of Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid, an organization of hundreds of volunteers and dozens of community organizations and faith institutions that came together in April 2022 to welcome asylum seekers arriving to the District of Columbia on buses sent by Texas Governor Abbott. Since our founding, we have welcomed thousands of people seeking safety in our community. In 2023 alone, over 1,800 adults and nearly 1,300 children came to access our free store located in a nearby church so newly arrived families could access supplies such as clothes, diapers, and shoes; our volunteers assisted with school enrollment for nearly 600 youth; our successful rent support program allowed us to jump-start new apartments for 50 families; and our furniture team obtained beds, couches, tables, chairs, and kitchen supplies for nearly 350 migrant families. Our medical programs have supported over 100 newly arrived children with their dental needs, over 80 adults and children with optometry care, and our perinatal support group has welcomed over 50 new babies to our community. We have led legal clinics to help hundreds of families apply for asylum, apply for Temporary Protected Status, and work permits. Over 50 children attended our summer camp programs last summer, and just this past weekend, our volunteers held a community baseball event with newly arrived youngsters in the community. Our vast volunteer network consists of people from all walks of life, who spend their free time showing a warm welcome to their new neighbors.

I have personally spent my weekends, early mornings, and evenings welcoming new arrivals off buses, helping new arrivals fill out immigration applications, sorting and distributing donations with my children, and delivering furniture and

household goods to my new neighbors. And for the final weeks of 2023 and the first few weeks of 2024, my family and I provided shelter in our home for an asylum-seeking family from Venezuela who was left on the streets during the cold DC winter after being denied shelter by DC Mayor Bowser's Office of Migrant Services that had in place a 3-night shelter limit at the time for migrants. My two boys shared a room for a few weeks, while this beautiful 1-year old girl and her sweet parents stayed in our home, shared meals with us, and became an extension of our family until they were able to get an apartment of their own a few miles away. It is through this personal experience that I know the joys and the strength that welcoming people with dignity can bring to our communities. And it is in my capacity as the Director of Refugee and Migrant Rights at Amnesty International USA, that I also know that it is the United States obligation to do so under international human rights and refugee law.

As the number of people fleeing violence and persecution continues to grow, protecting the human rights of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees is of critical importance. The dangerous circumstances facing people fleeing persecution, and those forced by violence, economic hardship and the climate crisis to journey across borders, continue to be one of the United States' most serious human rights concerns. Large numbers of migrants and refugees from across the world continue to make perilous journeys through Mexico in order to come to the United States to seek protection. As of the end of September 2023, over 114 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide.¹ In 2023, over 2.5 million asylum seekers and migrants entered the United States at the US-Mexico border.² The United States was the world's largest recipient of new asylum claims as of June 2023, with 540,600 new individual claims submitted.³ The majority of asylum claims were made by individuals from Latin America and the Caribbean, notably Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, Honduras and Haiti.⁴

Amnesty International has documented the conditions in these countries that force people to flee. In Venezuela, lack of access to economic and social rights is a serious concern, with the majority of the population experiencing severe food insecurity. Critics of President Maduro's government are arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared and tortured with the acquiescence of the judicial system. The UN Fact-Finding Mission on Venezuela exposed crimes against humanity, called for investigations into the state's repressive policies, and noted a lack of compliance with previous recommendations. Millions of Venezuelans have fled their country, and those who have been deported to the country have faced arbitrary arrest.

In Cuba, Amnesty International has documented how repression of dissent has led to activists, political opponents and journalists being harassed, persecuted and imprisoned. Cuba has faced an ongoing economic and humanitarian crisis resulting in shortages of food, fuel and electricity, while discrimination against minority groups is prevalent, affecting Afro-descendants, women and girls, LGBTQI people, and members of religious communities.

While in Haiti, decades of political instability, extreme poverty, natural disasters, the weakening of state institutions and the lack of real engagement from the international community, has left the population at risk of violence. The recent escalation of violence has reached alarming levels, with reports of dozens of deaths, kidnappings, sexual violence against women and girls, and the forced displacement of more than 35,000 people since the beginning of 2024.⁵

These situations demonstrate what are the drivers that force people to flee their homes, and the United States has both domestic and international obligations to provide access to territory and to individualized and fair assessments of all requests for protection by asylum seekers looking for safety at the border, in a way that does not discriminate based on migration status, including the manner of entry.⁶

¹ UNHRC Press Release, 25 October 2023, https://www.unhcr.org/us/news/press-releases/unhcr-forced-displacement-continues-grow-conflicts-escalate?_gl=1*12bi9yz*_rup_ga*MTQxMDkyNjU3Ny4xNzE3OTU0OTgz*_rup_ga_EVDQTJ4LjYxMTcxNzk1NDk4My4xLjYxMTcxNzk1NDk4My42MC4wLjA, last accessed 9 June 2024.

² CBP, "Southwest Land Border Encounters", 22 March 2024, cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters.

³ UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2023* (previously cited), p. 2; DHS, "Refugees and Asylees Annual Flow Report", dhs.gov/ohss/topics/immigration/refugees-asylees-af.

⁴ UNHCR, *Mid-Year Trends 2023* (previously cited), p. 24; UNHCR, *Global Trends—Forced Displacement in 2022*, 14 June 2023, [unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022](https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends-report-2022), p. 30.

⁵ UN, *Haiti se encuentra al borde de una hambruna*, <https://news.un.org/es/story/2024/03/1528312>.

⁶ UNHCR, *Advisory Opinion on the Extraterritorial Application of Non-Refoulement Obligations under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol*, Continued

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “access to a fair and efficient refugee status determination procedure is an essential element in the full and inclusive application of the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and indeed a safeguard to protect refugees and asylum seekers from refoulement,” which is the forcible return of an individual to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations (such as persecution or torture).⁷

In accordance with Title 8 of the US Code, any individual who is physically present in the United States or who arrives at the border must be given an opportunity to seek asylum.⁸ Nevertheless, in recent years, the United States has implemented a series of migration and asylum policies which have drastically limited access to asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border, resulting in irreparable harm to thousands of individuals seeking safety from persecution or serious human rights violations in their countries of origin.⁹ These include “metering”, the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), Title 42 and currently the Circumvention of Lawful Pathways Final Rule and President Biden’s latest executive proclamation and interim final rule.

Amnesty International released research last month on the human rights concerns raised by President Biden’s Circumvention of Lawful Pathways Final Rule and the CBP One Mobile application, particularly its mandatory use for people seeking asylum to schedule appointments to present themselves at U.S. ports of entry in order to present their asylum claims.¹⁰ The investigation, conducted by Amnesty International across various locations in Mexico and the U.S., involved interviews with hundreds of asylum seekers, service providers and local and international organizations. Amnesty International found that people seeking asylum experience challenges using the application due to an onerous registration process, technological errors and flaws and lack of knowledge about the application and how it works. Amnesty International also found that asylum seekers traveling through Mexico are extorted, kidnapped and experience discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence by both state and non-state actors. The majority stay in shelters or informal encampments with inadequate living conditions. People seeking asylum struggle to access healthcare, education and employment opportunities. There is no certainty as to when people seeking asylum will receive a CBP One appointment, which ends up leaving them exposed to violence and hardship for potentially long periods of time and pushes them to cross into the United States irregularly, due to a lack of alternatives.

Importantly, the last decade of deterrence policies has not stopped people from coming. Why? Because deterrence policies don’t work. Instead, they force people to make more dangerous routes to come to the U.S. and fuel criminal actors in Mexico who have constantly adapted to U.S. border policies to exploit and endanger people seeking safety. As a response, border resources are instead spread thin across all areas of the border, rather than allowing people to ask for protection in a dignified, orderly fashion. In recent years, policies have forced people to wait in Mexico until they have an opportunity to come to the U.S., further exacerbating the targeting and violence against people seeking safety in Mexico, particularly Black and Indigenous people. The extortion and criminal targeting of migrants in Mexico at the border has had lasting effects even when people make it to their new communities in the United States. People are spending their last cent and tapping out the resources of their family and friend networks in order to survive in Mexico, so that once they arrive in the United States, they are more likely to arrive indigent.

Amnesty International has recommended time and time again that the United States must modernize and invest in capacity at ports of entry in order to allow

26 January 2007, [unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45f17a1a4.html](https://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45f17a1a4.html), para. 7; UNHCR, “Comments of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on the Proposed Rule from the U.S. Department of Justice (Executive Office for Immigration Review) and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services): ‘Circumvention of Lawful Pathways’”, CIS No. 2736-22, DHS Docket No. USCIS 2022-0016, A.G. Order No. 5605-2023, 20 March 2023, [refworld.org/pdfid/6417e6674.pdf](https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/6417e6674.pdf), pp. 4-5; Amnesty International, *Mandatory Use of CBP One Application Violates the Right to Seek Asylum* (previously cited), pp. 7-9; Amnesty International, “They Did Not Treat Us Like People” (previously cited), p. 18.

⁷UNHCR, “Comments of the UNHCR on the Proposed Rule from the U.S. Department of Justice” (previously cited), p. 3.

⁸8 U.S.C. § 1158(a); American Immigration Council, *Metering and Asylum Turnbacks*, March 2021, americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/metering_and_asylum_turnbacks_0.pdf, p. 1.

⁹Amnesty International, *Americas: Pushback Practices and their Impact on the Human Rights of Migrants and Refugees* (AMR 01/3658/2021) 8 February 2021, [amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/3658/2021/en/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr01/3658/2021/en/), p. 1.

¹⁰Amnesty International, *CBP One—A Blessing or a Trap*, <https://www.amnestyusa.org/reports/cbp-one-a-blessing-or-a-trap/>

people to walk up in a safe, orderly manner and be processed expeditiously. The United States must invest CBP's Office of Field Operations to capacitate and staff ports of entry along the border to quickly and effectively process people seeking safety without having to wait in Mexico or be denied access to ports and expand the number of appointment available in the CBP One mobile application. Amnesty encourages the U.S. to end policies that punish asylum seekers for their manner of entry and instead invest in programs so people can proceed with their asylum claims in communities supported by lawyers, social workers, and community.

Border walls, mass surveillance, and detention centers are billion-dollar industries that have profited from U.S. border policies while communities across the country are struggling to provide adequate housing, schooling, health, and care for their residents—both new arrivals and community members that have been here for generations. And yet, the lack of federal support for coordinated and comprehensive reception of asylum seekers is jeopardizing the viability of the entire U.S. asylum system—and the U.S.'s ability to uphold its obligations to protect people seeking safety regardless of their connections in the United States. It benefits nobody for asylum seekers to find themselves on the streets of our border communities and big cities with nowhere to go. Communities across the United States receiving newcomers could benefit from an orderly system of support.

Cities at the border and the interior of the United States, struggle under the weight of new arrivals not because of new arrivals are a burden, but because communities are left to build up reception systems largely without federal coordination. The situation in New York City was a perfect storm of high numbers of new arrivals, exacerbated by Governor Abbott's busing program, and an arriving population of people seeking safety who did not already have family or community in the United States able to receive them. The United States' ability to provide protection for someone seeking safety should not depend on whether or not they have existing relationships in the United States who can provide for their socio-economic needs.

The sheltering of people seeking safety at Floyd Bennett Field was an example of where systems collapse when they fail to meet the needs of communities and of new arrivals. As New York City was struggling to respond to high numbers of new arrivals, there was a lack of focus on case management focused on resilience and financial independence, housing, and job programs to help get the new arrivals out of the shelters and into their new homes. Limited access to work permits and processing delays further exacerbated the issue by limiting new arrivals' ability to begin working and providing for their families. This led to the shelter population outpacing capacity in New York City, and the city finding far more remote and inaccessible places to shelter its new residents. In this instance, it is asylum seekers and New Yorkers bearing the brunt of the consequences of failed border policies.

Instead, a coordinated and funded welcome and reception system that meets the immediate and medium-term need of people seeking safety would cut the chaos and disfunction at the border and in big cities in the U.S., while state, local and tribal communities reap the windfall benefits of new federal funding avenues, spending power of new arrivals, and new tax revenue. Local governments and community organizations at the border have been working for years to build a welcoming infrastructure that eases capacity restraints on border agencies, prevents releases into the streets of border cities, educates new arrivals about their immigration responsibilities, and helps them stay off the streets and get connected to their friends, families, and new communities in the United States. And across the country, programs that provide people seeking safety with access to case management, legal assistance, and social services have been proven to be more cost effective than expensive detention programs, help people leave costly shelter systems and into homes of their own, and ensure people are able to comply with their immigration requirements. Further, new arrivals can meet the unmet needs of local economies, fill labor shortages, and greatly contribute to their new communities in ways that benefit all residents—both new and old.

A recent study by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that from 2005 to 2019, resettled refugees and people granted asylum in the U.S. contributed billions more in federal, state, and local government revenues than they received in services.¹¹ Newly arrived immigrants can be a boon to local economies as economists have estimated that for every 1,000 newly arrived workers, initial

¹¹U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *The Fiscal Impact of Refugees and Asylees at the Federal, State, and Local Levels from 2005 to 2019*, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/28fe4e756499bdab08b4e6cb3b952e22/aspe-report-refugee-fiscal-impact.pdf>

state and local tax revenues are expected to increase by \$2.5 million.¹² After these immigrants have been there for about five years, this same model predicts that for each 1,000 workers annual wages to be \$32 million and state and local tax revenues would be \$3.6 million.¹³

Extensive evidence-based international research has demonstrated that case management programs, when appropriately implemented, are the most successful form of supporting people navigating the immigration process.¹⁴ And legal representation is a critical path to ensure immigrants show up to court and comply with its requirements, help new arrivals get immigration relief, and unburden the courts by speeding up processing.¹⁵

The path forward is a system of coordinated support services that can ease the pressure at the border and enable newcomers to contribute to the communities who receive them. Specifically, Congress should robustly fund the Shelter and Services Program that provides financial support to local governments and community organizations to offer immediate reception services to people seeking safety; expand the Case Management Pilot Program to provide a voluntary, case management program to people seeking safety; and establish and fund a Destination Reception Fund to send federal dollars to state, local, and tribal communities to establish and expand medium-term reception programs that promote self-sufficiency of newcomers and bolsters local capacity to ensure new and old community members have what they need to thrive. The United States should also direct a whole of government approach to welcome that includes a new White House position and a new DHS office to coordinate intra-agency and inter-governmental efforts to welcome people seeking safety. The U.S. can no longer do this in a piecemeal, uncoordinated fashion.

For too many years, Congress has poured billions of taxpayer dollars into immigration enforcement-only responses to people seeking safety that have failed to meet the needs of newcomers—and has also left cities, counties, and community organizations to foot the bill—and face the human consequences—of providing support in the resulting chaos. Coordinated support services are cheaper than expensive detention programs and help state, local, and tribal governments and nonprofits better balance their budgets and services between newcomers and long-term community members.

I would like to close with the story of Karla. Karla arrived to the United States from Venezuela with her husband and two children to seek safety, security, and a new life in October 2022. Karla arrived with no sponsors in the United States who could house her, but had some community already in Washington, DC. When Karla and her family arrived at an under-resourced border town after being released from processing with the Department of Homeland Security, she had little choice but to take a free bus paid for by Texas Governor Greg Abbott to New York City. Upon arriving in New York, Karla and her family were greeted by city officials and non-governmental organizations who received and fed her family, provided overnight accommodations, and assistance getting tickets to Washington, DC. With a more coordinated reception system, Karla could have gone straight to her destination community.

When Karla and her family arrived in Washington, DC, they were provided shelter in a single hotel room with no kitchen for a year—while Karla and her husband found under-the-table work until they could hire an attorney, file for asylum, and eventually get their work permits. Finally, after saving up more money and receiving rental assistance from Migrant Solidarity Mutual Aid, Karla's family was able to move out of the shelter and into their new apartment in October 2023. Karla benefited from welcoming services both at the border and in New York City and says she could have moved out of the D.C. shelter sooner with earlier access to legal assistance, rental assistance, and case management aimed at resiliency. Karla, a licensed cosmetologist in Venezuela, has opened a cosmetology business in her new home and hopes to expand to be able to hire more workers and give back to her new community. This past April, Karla filed taxes for the first time in the United States and is putting her newly minted work permit to good use. She says that this is the first time that she's been able to pay rent and provide for her family,

¹²Immigration Research Initiative, *Economic Projections for Asylum Seekers and New Immigrants: U.S. and State-Level Data*, <https://immresearch.org/publications/economic-projections-for-asylum-seekers-and-new-immigrants-u-s-and-50-states/>

¹³*Id.*

¹⁴International Detention Coalition, *Gaining Ground: Promising Practice to Reduce and End Immigration Detention*, <https://idcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Gaining-Ground-Report-2022.pdf>

¹⁵Vera Institute of Justice, *The Case for Universal Representation*, <https://www.vera.org/advancing-universal-representation-toolkit/the-case-for-universal-representation-1>

a dream come true for her, and she's grateful to this country for all that it has given her.

Newcomers don't damage our communities; they make them brighter and more vibrant and help our economies grow. Families across the United States are struggling to make ends meet while they see billions of their taxpayer dollars fuel policies at the border that have created heartbreaking humanitarian crises and chaos everywhere from small towns to big cities. Brave, resilient families and individuals are arriving at the U.S. southern border to exercise their right to seek safety and seek a new life where they follow their dreams and contribute to their new communities only to be thrust into a broken system that profits off their suffering. The United States is abandoning decades old international obligations to uphold the human right to seek asylum and not send people back to the very harms that they fled. Decades of Congressional inaction, pitting of communities against each other, and political mudslinging have failed to produce any solutions that work for communities—neither those who have called the United States home for generations or those arriving at our borders with dreams. Amnesty International USA encourages Congress to instead invest in solutions that uphold the safety and dignity of all our communities.

Thank you, again, to the subcommittee for the opportunity to testify.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD TO AMY FISCHER, DIRECTOR, REFUGEE AND MIGRANT RIGHTS, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA

Questions Submitted by Representative Gosar

Question 1. In your written testimony, you say, "There was a lack of focus on case management focused on resilience and financial independence, housing, and job programs to help get the new arrivals out of the shelters and into their new homes." Why was that the case?

Answer. Case Management programs connect people seeking safety to the tools and resources they need to settle into their new communities, enroll their children in schools, start providing for themselves so they can leave costly shelter programs, comply with their immigration requirements, and begin contributing to their new communities. These programs should be implemented by nonprofit entities like faith, ethnic, and community-based organizations or resettlement agencies that have experience with helping newly arrived refugees settle into their new communities. When New York City started receiving high numbers of newly arrived asylum seekers, officials focused on building out an emergency structure to receive new arrivals, but failed to invest in the types of programs and services that would then help people be able to exit shelters, work, and live dependently. For example, in 2023, the NYC government signed a \$432 million contract with DocGo, a private medical services provider with no prior experience caring for asylum seekers, to house and care for new arrivals in NYC shelters. It was only in April 2024, that NYC then ended that contract with DocGo amid reports of abuse and mismanagement and began seeking contracting services from "nonprofits and internationally recognized resettlement providers." Amnesty International USA believes that had the City instead made these investments in 2022 when it began to receive high numbers of people seeking safety in its shelter system, it could have jumpstarted new arrivals' ability to leave shelters and make space for newer arrivals and prevented the resulting ballooning of the shelter population.

Question 2. In your written testimony, you talk about how New Yorkers and Asylum Seekers are bearing the brunt of failed border policies. What policies that are currently in place have failed?

Answer. For years, Congress has poured billions of taxpayer dollars into border policies aimed at deterring migration including but not limited to militarization, externalization of borders, widespread use of immigration detention, and expedited removals. On June 4, the Biden Administration issued a "Presidential Proclamation to Suspend and Limit Entry and Joint DHS-DOJ Interim Final Rule to Restrict Asylum During High Encounters at the Southern Border" which Amnesty International USA considers to violate the US obligations under international human rights and refugee law. This new proclamation adds to the Biden Administration's Circumvention of Lawful Pathways Final Rule. These current policies require people to use the CBP One application to seek asylum in the United States, and the fact that it is only possible to apply for appointments from central to northern Mexico

means that asylum seekers must now wait in Mexico for undetermined amounts of time while they apply for CBP One appointments. Amnesty International found that asylum seekers traveling through Mexico are often extorted, kidnapped and experience discrimination and sexual and gender-based violence by both state and non-state actors. Increasing wait times for CBP One appointments and uncertainty about when people seeking asylum will be given an appointment, compounded by the dangerous and difficult situation in Mexico, and Mexican authorities blocking access to ports of entry has forced many asylum seekers to make the difficult decision to cross into the United States without a CBP One appointment, and under current policy, they will be removed without access to asylum. Because people are tapping out their resources in order to survive in Mexico, they are arriving to cities like New York without even the most basic of resources. Alternatively, a coordinated system that upholds human rights and invests in systems that welcome people seeking safety would save tax payer dollars while easing pressure at the border, and enabling newcomers to contribute to the communities who receive them.

Question 3. Do you believe that one of the reasons why New Yorkers and Asylum Seekers bear the brunt of these failed policies was because of poor planning by the Biden Administration in the execution of Floyd Bennett Field?

Answer. The Biden Administration struggled to adopt a coordinated national response to welcome high numbers of asylum seekers, and instead, ceded the strategy to Governor Abbott's Operation Lone Star busing program which bused thousands of people seeking safety without existing ties to the United States to New York City, as well as Washington D.C., Chicago, Denver, and Los Angeles. Amnesty believes that an Office of Reception Coordination tasked with leading a whole-of-government response to mobilize federal agencies and serving as a liaison to receiving communities and programs welcoming people seeking safety would instead prevent Floyd Bennett Field from becoming a necessity. This coordinating office would facilitate cooperation across federal agencies, share timely information with states and localities to better plan responses and ensure efficient use of resources, and help government and nongovernmental service providers navigate and access available federal resources.

Question 4. According to the U.N., the massive numbers of deaths and disappearances of migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border has made it the deadliest land migration route for migrants worldwide. Meanwhile, the cartels are exploiting migrants seeking to enter the U.S., demanding thousands of dollars per migrant, and in some instances forcing migrants into cartel labor. Ms. Fischer, would you agree that an unprecedented humanitarian crisis has unfolded at the Southern Border under the President Biden?

Answer. Amnesty International and our colleagues at other prominent human rights organizations have long documented the human rights consequences of deterrence policies on the safety of asylum seekers in Mexico, spanning presidential administrations. Amnesty International has documented how asylum seekers traveling through the country face the serious risk of being extorted, kidnapped and experiencing discrimination and sexual and gender based violence by both state and non-state actors. According to a survey conducted by UNHCR and its partners in Mexico in 2023, 56% of those interviewed had been victims of violence during their transit through Mexico, while 42% experienced a violent incident on their journey prior to arriving in Mexico. Eighty-five percent of the migrants Doctors Without Borders (MSF) attended to in the first half of 2023 had been victims of intentional violence on their journey through Mexico. Following the end of Title 42, there has been an increase in kidnappings of asylum seekers, especially on the routes to Matamoros, Reynosa and Piedras Negras, as well as in these cities. Amnesty International has documented incidents of asylum seekers who were kidnapped right outside of shelters, at bus terminals and from apartments that they were renting. Human Rights First has also extensively documented an increase in kidnappings of asylum seekers in Chihuahua, Matamoros and Reynosa. And a 2024 study by WOLA found that "the kidnapping and extortion of migrants has increased notably since late 2023" with "many describ[ing] this moment as the worst period of violence they've seen, both in numbers and brutality." There has also been an increase in sexual and gender-based violence committed against asylum seekers in Mexico. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) reported a 70% increase in consultations for sexual violence in Reynosa and Matamoros in the last quarter of 2023 compared with the third quarter of the same year.

Amnesty International has found that the increase in violence targeting asylum seekers in Mexico is a result of deterrence policies that make it more difficult to seek safety and increase the penalties for doing so. Criminal actors have been

nimble enough to respond to changing U.S. border policies, particularly the deterrence policies of the last decade that have been proven ineffective time and time again at reducing the number of people arriving to our borders. Even the extremely cruel practice of President Trump's family separation failed to deter people coming to the US—by the end of 2018, the number of families and children coming to the border was going up again. What deterrence policies do accomplish is increase violence facing migrants along the border, fuel private companies who profit off detention in the U.S. and criminal actors in Mexico who profit off of at-risk families seeking safety.

Question 5. We know that not all people crossing the border enter for malicious purposes. Some are families. However, government agencies such as the Border Patrol and DEA confirm that the Mexican cartels exploit our open Southern Border and the migrant crisis to smuggle massive amounts of fentanyl into the U.S., now found in every community in our nation. Not to mention the cartel's human trafficking trade, which forces young men and women into terrible lives of cartel labor and crime. What do you believe is the appropriate solution for President Biden's crisis at the Southern Border, that will end the cartels' rampant abuse of our immigration system?

Answer. Fentanyl is smuggled into the United States by U.S. Citizens who do so at U.S. ports of entry, not between ports of entry. Furthermore, only .02% of people who have crossed into the United States between ports of entry possessed any fentanyl. There is simply no factual connection between the people arriving to our borders to seek safety and the issue of fentanyl impacting communities across the United States. The United States should adopt public health solutions to address the addiction issues facing people struggling with drug use rather than placing the blame at the feet of people seeking safety. Furthermore, Congress should fund CBP's Office of Field Operations to capacitate and staff ports of entry along the border to quickly and effectively process people seeking safety without having to wait in Mexico or be denied access to ports. Such an investment would allow border agents to focus on intercepting the fentanyl brought to the United States by U.S. citizens at ports rather than being diverted to respond to humanitarian issues across the border.

Question 6. On June 4, 2024, you tweeted out, “@POTUS just announced his most restrictive border policy to date—a first of its kind cap on asylum using the same legal authority Trump used for the Muslim Ban. Children and families who fled their homes in search of safety will now be stranded and in danger.” Has President Biden failed our nation regarding immigration?

Answer. Amnesty International USA is a human rights organization that is dedicated to ensuring the United States abides by its international human rights obligations and does not determine if any president has “failed” or not. Amnesty has long documented U.S. immigration policies that violate human rights spanning multiple presidential administrations.

Question 7. Does President Biden currently have the authority to resolve some of the issues you see contributing to the humanitarian crisis through executive action?

Answer. Yes. Amnesty International has called upon the Biden Administration to reverse course on both his most recent Presidential Proclamation as well as the Circumvention of Lawful Pathways Final Rule. We have also called upon the Biden Administration to expand humanitarian pathways to the United States, expand the number of appointments available in the CBP One mobile application and ensure that it is not mandatory, end all policies that punish asylum seekers for their manner of entry, and invest in programs so people can proceed with their asylum claims in communities supported by lawyers, social workers, and community, not in costly, abusive cages or detention centers.

Question 8. The Floyd Bennett Field Migrant Camp is a flailing effort by the Biden Administration to deal with the Southern Border crisis of their own creation. Unsurprisingly, we have received near constant reports of increasing crime at the Camp and in surrounding communities, displaced migrant families, and unsafe living conditions. For these reasons, the migrants themselves do not want to reside at Floyd Bennet Field. Do you believe that the Floyd Bennett Field encampment was a mistake? That it should not have been done?

Answer. Amnesty International USA has not independently visited Floyd Bennett Field to verify the above. However, as noted in my answers above and in my testimony, we strongly believe that with better federal coordination and city and state

authorities investing earlier in evidence-based case management, the situation at Floyd Bennett Field could have been avoided.

Question 9. What do you believe led to the rise in crime in New York City following the opening of Floyd Bennett Field?

Answer. There has been no rise in crime in New York City. In fact, since April 2022 when New York City first started receiving high numbers of newly arrived people seeking safety, the overall crime rate in New York City has remained flat, and as the New York Times reported, “many major categories of crime—including rape, murder, and shootings—have decreased, according to an analysis of New York Police Department’s month-by-month statistics since April 2022.”

Question 10. What do you believe led to the rise in crime in New York City following the opening of Floyd Bennett Field?

Answer. There has been no rise in crime in New York City. In fact, since April 2022 when New York City first started receiving high numbers of newly arrived people seeking safety, the overall crime rate in New York City has remained flat, and as the New York Times reported, “many major categories of crime—including rape, murder, and shootings—have decreased, according to an analysis of New York Police Department’s month-by-month statistics since April 2022.”

Questions Submitted by Representative Stansbury

Question 1. Republicans claim that the influx of migrants into the United States is responsible for a surge in violent crime in New York City and nationwide. Is there any evidence to support this claim?

Answer. No, there is no evidence that supports the notion that migrants or asylum seekers increase crime in their communities. As noted above, crime rates in New York City have stayed flat since the city started receiving high numbers of new arrivals. Moreover, violent crime in New York City has decreased over this period of time. This data also holds nationally and over time. In 2023, researchers at Stanford University found that immigrants are 60% less likely than those born in the US to be incarcerated. Researchers from the Marshall Project also looked at the connection between undocumented immigrants and crime and found that there was no link between crime rates and undocumented populations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and respond to these additional questions for the record.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much, Ms. Fischer. And now, Ms. Morrissey, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH MORRISSEY, PRESIDENT, MADISON MARINE PARK HOMECREST CIVIC ASSOCIATION, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

Ms. MORRISSEY. Good morning, Chairman Gosar and Ranking Member. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Elizabeth Morrissey, a civic leader from Marine Park Madison Homecrest Civic Association, a community in South Brooklyn where Floyd Bennett Field is located. I am also a retired New York City Police Department lieutenant, and have lived in the area for 52 years.

As you are aware, the state and the city sought assistance from the Federal Government through the Department of the Interior to house thousands of migrants at Floyd Bennett Field. As local civic leaders and residents, we were told the city had no other options. Floyd Bennett Field is a national park with significant historic value to our community. If you have not visited, you would also understand that the park has provided a lot of resources, including things like aviation club and outdoor spaces for our residents and

visitors. That being said, it does not have proper infrastructure for housing people.

When we first heard the rumors of this lease being signed between the National Park Service and the City of New York, as involved citizens we tried to find an official way to make our voices heard. However, we were repeatedly denied our community. When we tried to explain the challenges of Floyd Bennett Field, including the fact that it lacks infrastructure and it is located on a floodplain, we were ignored.

Instead, the city chose to prioritize the rights of sheltering migrants at this site. In particular, my question is, where do the rights of migrants end and our rights begin as taxpayers?

If you were at Floyd Bennett Field today, you would realize quickly that you are not allowed access to the migrant camp unless you are a migrant. As a taxpayer and local civic leader, I have no right to enter the shelter. Even local NYPD officers have difficulty entering the site when called without first being approved by hired private security. However, migrants can enter our community with little to no documentation and stay in the camp, which houses families, particularly all without documentation you and I would need to get basic driver's licenses.

It is not humane to house thousands and thousands of migrants in a flood zone. Remember Sandy? We were under water. One storm over the past few months was so bad the city had to evacuate the migrants and move them to a local high school gym, James Madison, for shelter, which resulted in the school being closed the next day to our kids. Is that right? Is it right and humane for our community to observe migrant children, sometimes accompanied and sometimes not, with parents begging and selling candy and fruit on the Flatbush Avenue median between our four lanes of traffic on each side? The children are sometimes doing it during school hours.

Floyd Bennett is the very end of the Brooklyn. So, kids have to be bussed all over the school to attend. No one is enforcing that right.

The community also has to avoid migrants from jumping in front of cars while driving. Migrants are trying to get hit or say they were hit to demand money, or they will call the police. The scheme has been reported on several news publications as recently as last week. Is that right?

Basic errands to local businesses have become torturous between begging and shopping, parking lots, and aggressive panhandling of migrants to carry packages for money. Home Depot and Lowe's parking lots are full of migrants, causing fear to our elderly and angering others. Our community members are just trying to run simple errands on their days off from work for their families. Is that right?

There are videos of large fights breaking out in Floyd Bennett. There are domestic calls putting a greater strain on our first responders. Our city agencies are already low on manpower. The state cannot house thousands and thousands of migrants in close quarters, basically like caged animals, and think violence will not happen. Is that right?

Again, the worst part is the children are being used by migrant parents to follow delivery trucks and steal packages from the trucks, community stoops, and alleyways, ringing doorbells, asking for money. Is that right?

Our local stores have migrants coming in and grabbing products, causing some to lock their doors. Our local stores are struggling already.

The summer is coming. Is it humane to leave migrants on tarmacs in the blazing sun? Having visited Floyd Bennett prior to becoming a national park, once New York City's first airport, it serves as an incredible piece of history. But at the core, it is an aviation base. If our middle-class community sees how wrong and humane this is, I can't understand how the rest of the world, particularly officials from the city and state of New York, are blind to this.

I will end with this. "Things do not happen; things are made to happen," John F. Kennedy. Our state is making things happen that are not humane for anybody. If there is loss of life this year from violence or heat, the state and the city of New York made it happen.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Morrissey follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ELIZABETH MORRISSEY, CIVIC LEADER FROM THE MARINE PARK/MADISON/HOMECREST CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Good morning, Chairman Gosar and Ranking Member. Thank you for inviting me to testify today. My name is Elizabeth Morrissey, a civic leader from the Marine Park/Madison/Homecrest Civic Association, a community in Southern Brooklyn, where Floyd Bennett field is located. I am also a retired New York City Police Department Lieutenant, and have lived in the area for 52 years.

As you are aware, the state and city sought assistance from the federal government, through the Department of the Interior, to house thousands of migrants at Floyd Bennett Field.

As local civic leaders and residents, we were told the city had no other options. Floyd Bennett Field is a national park, with significant historic value to our community. If you have not visited, you would also understand that this park provided a lot of resources, including things like aviation club and outdoor spaces for our residents and visitors. That being said, it does not have proper infrastructure for housing people.

When we first heard the rumors of this lease being signed between the National Park Service and the City of New York, as involved citizens, we tried to find an official way to make our voices heard. However, we were repeatedly denied. Our community when we tried to explain the challenges of Floyd Bennett Field, including the fact that it lacks infrastructure and is located on a floodplain, but we were ignored.

Instead, the City chose to prioritize the rights of sheltering migrants at this site in particular. My question is, where do the rights of migrant's end, and our rights, as taxpayers, begin.

If you were to visit Floyd Bennett Field today, you would realize quickly that you are not allowed access to the migrant camp, unless you are a migrant. As a taxpayer and local civic leader, I have no right to enter the shelter. Even local NYPD officers have had difficulty entering the site when called, without first being approved by hired private security. However, migrants can enter our community with little to no documentation, and stay in this camp, which houses, families, primarily, all without the documentation you or I would need to get a basic drivers license.

Is it not humane to house thousands and thousands of migrants in a flood zone? Remember Sandy, we were under water? One storm over the past few months was so bad, the city had to evacuate the migrants and move them to our local high school's gym, James Madison for shelter, which resulted in the school being closed the next day to our kids. Is that right?

Is it right and humane for our community to observe migrant children sometimes accompanied and sometimes not with their parents begging and selling candy and fruit on the Flatbush Ave median between four lanes of traffic on each side. The children are sometimes doing it during school hours. Floyd Bennett Field is at the very end of Brooklyn, so kids have to be bused all over the city to attend school, and no one is enforcing kids going to school. Is that right?

The community has to avoid migrants from jumping in front of their cars while driving. Migrants are trying to get hit or say they were hit to demand money, or they will call the police. The scheme has been reported on by several news publications as recently as last week. Is that right?

Basic errands to local business have become torturous between the begging in shopping parking lots and the aggressive panhandling of migrants to carry packages for money. Home Depot and Lowes parking lots are full of migrants causing fear to our elderly and anger to others. Our community members are trying to run simple errands on their days off from work for their families. Is that right?

There are videos of large fights breaking out in Floyd Bennett Field, there are domestic calls, Emergency Medical Service calls, putting a greater strain on our first responders. Our city agencies are already low on manpower. The State and City cannot house thousands and thousands of migrants in close quarters, basically like caged animals and think violence will not happen. Is this right?

Again, the worse part are the children who are being used by the migrant parents to follow delivery trucks and steal packages from the truck and the communities stoops and area ways. Ringing door bells asking for money. Is this right?

Our local stores have migrants coming in and grabbing products, causing some to lock their doors. Our local stores are struggling already from the aftermaths of Covid. Kings Plaza has become a place migrants run into and steal merchandise while community members are shopping. Is this right?

The summer is coming, is it humane to leave the migrants on the tar mats in the blazing sun. For those of you who haven't visited Floyd Bennett Field, prior to becoming a national park, was once New York City's first airport. It serves as an incredible piece of history, but at its core, is an aviation base.

The specific area where the migrants camp is set up is on an old historic runway. This is not the ideal place to house thousands of people for months or even longer. Violence happened during the winter months, never mind what will happen when the temperatures rise in the summer months.

If our middle-class community sees how wrong and inhumane this is, I cannot understand how the rest of the world particularly officials from the City and State of New York are blind to this.

I will end with "Things do not happen. Things are made to happen" John F. Kennedy

Our State is making things happen that are not humane for anybody, if there is loss of life this year from violence or heat, the State and City of New York made it happen.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you very much for your comments. We are now going to go to Members' questions.

First, Mr. Tiffany from Wisconsin.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, Mr. King, I want to say your question you pose is very good. Whose park is it next? Because I am concerned about the national lakeshore that we have in Wisconsin. Or is it going to be other national parks across our country that are going to be next?

But I want to ask a question of Representative Williams. I see one of your statements here says, "without any input from the surrounding communities." Is that correct, that the Federal Government didn't come in and coordinate with local communities and ask them, "Is it OK to do this? How can we work out the logistics of making this happen?"

Ms. WILLIAMS. There was absolutely no input, no communication whatsoever regarding Floyd Bennett Field to the residents of the Assembly District.

Mr. TIFFANY. Thank you.

Ms. FISCHER, do you think that the Federal Government should coordinate with local communities in situations like this, rather than leaving them shut out, as Representative Williams just said?

Ms. FISCHER. I wholeheartedly agree. I think when we are able to ensure that community members, local governments, and people can come together to work through solutions, then that is obviously ideal.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, you believe they should coordinate, right, Ms. Fischer?

Ms. FISCHER. Yes, sir.

Mr. TIFFANY. That they should coordinate. And you had referenced people fleeing violence and persecution in your testimony. Should we be allowing people to come into this country, we have had over 10 million, that are simply economic migrants?

I have been to the border numerous times. I have been to Panama, down to the Darien Gap. Should people be allowed in as economic migrants?

Ms. FISCHER. I think the data actually shows a little bit of a different story. Over three-quarters of the people that file for asylum eventually are able to stay in the United States due to the fact that they are able to win their asylum cases or find other forms of relief. So, this notion that people that are arriving here are coming for purely economic reasons is not based in fact.

Mr. TIFFANY. The migrants that I actually talked to down on the border said, no, we just came here because the border was announced that it was open January 20, 2021. Do you believe they should be allowed in this country under our asylum laws?

Ms. FISCHER. I have been to the border numbers of times.

Mr. TIFFANY. Yes or no, should they be allowed in if they are simply economic migrants?

Ms. FISCHER. Everyone has a human right to seek asylum. It is up to the immigration courts to determine whether or not someone has a valid claim.

Mr. TIFFANY. I will take that as a yes.

Is there anyone, Ms. Fischer, that should not be allowed into our country that wants to come into the United States from a foreign country?

Ms. FISCHER. The United States has the ability to enforce its borders. Amnesty International does not tell any country whether or not they should or should not be able to enforce their borders.

Mr. TIFFANY. So, there are some people that should be denied entry into our country. Is that what you are saying?

Ms. FISCHER. That is the position of the United States to figure out themselves. That cannot come at the expense of the United States' obligations to uphold the human right to seek asylum.

Mr. TIFFANY. You talked about our obligation under international law. Do you believe international law trumps American law?

Ms. FISCHER. No, sir, I do not, and that is why the United States has long established that seeking asylum is a human right under domestic law. In 1980, Congress passed the Refugee Act, which—

Mr. TIFFANY. But the law also says you have to prove that you are a refugee, correct?

Ms. FISCHER. No, sir. The law proves that people have the opportunity to seek asylum regardless of their manner of entry. And they have a process by which they are determined whether or not they have a way to stay.

Mr. TIFFANY. Which is the process of proving whether—yes, so it does say that under the law.

Is it humane to have Americans' earnings reduced due to illegal immigrants coming to take their jobs? In the last jobs report, half of the jobs that are created here in America in this last jobs report are going to people who are here illegally. Is it humane to have Americans have their pay reduced as a result of the competition that is coming?

Ms. FISCHER. There is actually no evidence that shows that immigration has an impact on wages. The United States—

Mr. TIFFANY. Actually, there is, Ms. Fischer. If you go back to the previous administration, the people on the lowest economic strata, their wages were actually going up significantly.

I want to get just a couple of other questions in. Should taxpayers have to pay for food for the people you are referencing?

Ms. FISCHER. What we know—

Mr. TIFFANY. Should taxpayers have to pay for shelter or rent for those people that are coming in?

Ms. FISCHER. Those types of programs are significantly less costly than the programs that we have in the moment that are very—

Mr. TIFFANY. Should they have to pay for attorneys for these people?

Ms. FISCHER. The right to counsel in court is a bedrock of our criminal justice system, and I believe it should be extended to those—

Mr. TIFFANY. So, should they have to pay for a gym membership? A person you are referencing, should they have to pay for a gym membership if someone requests it?

Ms. FISCHER. I don't think so, and I am not aware of any such program.

Dr. GOSAR. The gentleman is out of time. We may go a second round.

Mr. TIFFANY. Chairman, thank you very much for the time.

Dr. GOSAR. You are very welcome.

Mr. TIFFANY. I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. The gentlewoman from New Mexico is recognized.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

One quick note. We are getting some messages that folks are having trouble hearing. So, if you can speak up in the microphones, that would be helpful.

First of all, I want to say I am very sensitive to the local concerns, so please don't take the antagonism that you are seeing and hearing on the dais as in any way dismissive of the local community's concerns about what you are experiencing. It is just about process. It is about how the resources of this Committee are used, the kinds of issues that are within the jurisdiction of this Committee, and what this Committee is actually tasked with.

I do want to talk a little bit, since we are here to talk about immigration, and that is what the Committee leadership has

chosen to do to, to ask some follow-up questions. Ms. Fischer, I think it is really important for people to understand what is driving immigration on a global scale. We are seeing immigrants all across the world seeking asylum not only in the United States, but also across other countries in Europe and Asia. We have immigrants coming from Venezuela, Cuba, Haiti, Turkey, many West African countries right now. Talk to us about what some of the driving factors are for these families that are trying to find asylum.

Ms. FISCHER. Thank you so much for the question.

As you noted, as of the end of September 2023, there were over 114 million people forcibly displaced worldwide. I think it is important to note that over 76 percent of those people are actually hosted in low- and middle-income countries, not the United States. The people that are coming to the United States are mostly coming from countries like Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, Honduras, and Haiti, as you mentioned.

In Venezuela, there is a lack of access to economic and social rights, and the majority of the population there is experiencing extreme food insecurity. Notably, critics of President Maduro's government are arbitrarily detained, forcibly disappeared, and tortured with the acquiescence of the judicial system. And Amnesty has documented that people that have been deported to Venezuela have faced arbitrary arrest.

People come from all over. When I was most recently at the border, I had the opportunity of speaking to a group of Afghans who were seeking asylum. They were members of an ethnic minority group, women and students who were fleeing the Taliban rule. So, people really come with all different reasons to seek safety and exercise that human right.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you. And I think that those examples are really important for people to understand.

I represent New Mexico. And a lot of the rhetoric that we hear around here around immigration is every state is a border state. Well, New Mexico is an actual border state. And we have the opportunity, through our institutions and the various programs and services that are working with asylees, to hear their stories. Folks are coming from all over the world. And the journeys that they go on to arrive here are not unlike probably everyone in this room's—unless you are Indigenous, or you are black, your journey to get here to the United States was probably not unlike the journeys of the people who are coming here today. They are traveling thousands of miles. They are putting their lives on the line. They are experiencing the most possible risks of violence, things that could happen to their families.

And when I think about it, and really imagine my own ancestors, many of whom came to the United States in the 1850s at the height of the Irish potato famine, it is amazing to me when you sit in hearings like this, because, literally, the rhetoric that you are hearing here on the dais could be a hearing from 1850, because this is the same argument that people have been making about immigration, immigrants, the diminishing of people and their struggles, and whether or not they deserve to be here, the diminishing of their ethnicity, their culture, their language, the diminishing of whether or not it is appropriate for women and

children who are facing rape and political violence in their country to come to the United States.

I mean, really, that is what this is. It is just a repeat. And it happens to be an incredibly potent issue politically right now during an election year. So, it is disturbing to hear, especially in a Committee like this, to be used in this way.

But the other question I want to ask, and like I said, I don't want to diminish the very serious issues that have been raised by our local officials and community residents, and I know we are going to do a second round, so I will save my questions about this, is how we can help create a more orderly situation through bipartisan immigration reform, and to make sure that we can address these local concerns for communities that are receiving large numbers of immigrants.

And with that, I will yield back and hold for the second round.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentlelady from New Mexico. The gentleman from the great state of Arkansas, the Chair of the Full Committee, Mr. Westerman, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Chairman Gosar, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

And I would like to talk a bit more about how this process of leasing national park land for a migrant camp circumvented the rules for political purposes. This is something that we have seen time and time again from the Biden administration. If you read the lease signed between the National Park Service and the City of New York, it correctly identifies Floyd Bennett Field as historic property.

Now, here is where things get interesting. Instead of the typical Section 106 process, which often involves an extensive review process, it appears it has been waived. Rather, the lease refers to a memo signed by Director Sams that notes that the city will make upgrades and improvements to the historic area once the lease expires.

Now, this is an interesting turn of events. Essentially, there is no guarantee that either construction nor the existence of the migrant camp will not endanger the historic area, something that would generally be required. Instead, the Park Service is accepting a promise of future payments for improvements to the area. Basically, they are accepting a payoff for the lease.

I would like to know more if this is the norm for the Biden administration these days. But those decision makers don't always want to answer questions in a public setting. I am adding both a copy of the lease agreement and memo for the record.

Now, to get to my question, in a typical process a lease for historic property on Federal land would involve some level of public engagement. So, Ms. Williams, to your knowledge, did the National Park Service or any other Federal agency consult and coordinate with any historic preservation office or council before leasing historic Floyd Bennett Field to be used as a migrant camp?

Ms. WILLIAMS. To answer your question, which was similar to an earlier question, there was no communication with us or the residents of South Brooklyn and Queens, or any type of historic entity whatsoever.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Did the National Park Service or any other Federal agency transparently provide the public information about how establishing a migrant encampment would impact Floyd Bennett Field's historic property?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Absolutely none.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And did the Park Service or any other Federal agency seek public comment or even input from local elected officials prior to signing the lease with the city?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Negative. There was no such communication at any time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. So, they basically just ramrodded this through and sidestepped any kind of normal process.

And I can tell you I know the answer to that because they did, and that is why we continually bring this subject up is because, if they will do this at Floyd Bennett Field, where else will they do it?

And an Administration that talks about protecting public assets, protecting the environment, never wavering on any kind of environmental permitting, it seems ironic that they would just magically wave the magic baton, which essentially has to come from President Biden at that level, and what it looks like they did was declared an emergency so they could waive all permitting, public input, and review processes to push this agenda and to provide this migrant camp on Federal land.

I can tell you, when this Congress started, this was the furthest thing from my mind that this Committee would have to deal with, that this Administration would go onto Park Service land, waive every rule, and build a migrant camp. Can you describe how shocking that was to you, being a resident? I mean, was this something you ever expected to happen?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Definitely, no. And to the bigger picture, I do represent 137,000-plus people in my district, and I did have to answer to them. So, with not having that communication, it was very disrespectful to our residents, to our community.

And we know what is happening. It is a national crisis, and we understand that. But when there is lack of communication, what we are seeing right now, when we were here before 9 months ago, we are seeing that our community, South Brooklyn and Queens, have become benefactors of a national crisis.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And have you had any communication with the Federal agencies on whether they will renew the lease in September?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, that is why we are here, to plead before you, and we will continue to do so, asking them to please not renew that lease because, if we want to think of a more dignified, humane way where these people can have a life, and not be able to live in such an area.

And we can compare this to Orchard Beach, that was in the Bronx, right? The tents were put up, it was susceptible to flooding, lack of access to transportation. This is no different from Floyd Bennett Field. And they did remove those tents. So, we need to treat people with some type of dignity. Thank you.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And the point being, Representative, is that you are asking, but they are not making any outreach to you to

give you assurances, or to answer questions, or tell you what their plans are.

Ms. WILLIAMS. There is no transparency.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you very much.

Ms. WILLIAMS. You are welcome.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman from Montana is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I heard this microphone is a little bit light, so I will try and keep it up.

Dr. GOSAR. Eat it.

Mr. ROSENDALE. Eat it? OK. Thanks, yes.

Just to start off, I am always amused by the references to the immigration that took place in our country from the late 1800s to the early 1900s, which never, when our colleagues are talking about it, never mentions the requirement that these immigrants had to have sponsorship from citizens here in our country, and the fact that they were not provided with this incredibly large social safety net of Federal support that costs the taxpayers across this country somewhere in the neighborhood of \$150 to \$500 billion a year, which we can't even keep track of because so much of this money is being laundered through non-governmental organizations.

Chairman Gosar, I appreciate you having this hearing today. And the impact of President Biden's border policies extends far beyond the border regions, now affecting our cherished national parks. Just last week, we discussed the harms inflicted upon Montana's tribal lands. But it is not just the tribes that are being affected, it is the entire West, and the natural beauty that our parks and our countries hold most sacred.

President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and their entire Administration have no interest in border security. We have long since established that. We have seen what this Administration and their allies in New York have done by allowing illegal aliens to reside on Floyd Bennett Field, turning a once beautiful park into a Third World slum. These destructive policies are not only affecting Americans' park access and enjoyment, but also local communities and farmers are being harmed by uncontrolled immigration, as evidenced by Bozeman, Montana, a 29 percent increase in felony cases over the past year, and that is attributed directly to the illegal immigration that is taking place on the southern border.

Additionally, fentanyl seizures by Montana Highway Patrol have increased from 188,823 doses in 2022 to a staggering 398,522 doses in 2023, resulting in the loss of 80 Montanans to fentanyl in 2023. So, this crisis is touching the entire country.

We must secure the border and protect the lives of our citizens. If we had a tally of death and destruction to the tune of 75,000 to 90,000 people a year that was being caused by gunmen coming across the border, we would attack that country. But meanwhile, we allow it to sit wide open because it is the southern border and fentanyl coming across.

Furthermore, the northern border must not be forgotten. U.S. Customs and Border Protection reported that Fiscal Year 2023 saw 189,000 northern land border encounters, which is a 73 percent increase from 2022, and a 597 percent increase from 2021.

We have established again that the cartels, once they find out where the pressure is being applied, they adapt, they change, and they start utilizing different tactics. And that is what we are seeing take place right now on the northern border. This issue is especially critical as Montana's Glacier National Park lies on the border between the United States and Canada. President Biden and his Administration must provide real solutions for our border, and help preserve the safety and beauty of our nation and its parks.

You folks are dealing with this directly. Ms. Williams, when you talk to fellow Assembly members, do they share the same concerns that you do, or are you just an isolated outlier?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, you are absolutely right. Very few share this same concern that I have and a few other elected City Council members. And that is why we are here today to bring light to what our communities are facing before you.

Mr. ROSENDALE. OK. So, we are going to start talking to the communities then.

Mr. King, as a long-time community leader in New York, has there ever been a time in your life where you have seen New York local government be so indifferent towards the interests of their taxpaying citizens and the communities in which they are supposed to protect?

Mr. KING. It is pretty rare. I think there are times when they are desperate to move problems out of Manhattan and into the outer boroughs. We all experience that. But this was egregious.

Mr. ROSENDALE. So, on the grassroots level, what have you seen regarding the outcry related to the usage of Floyd Bennett Field and the extreme costs the city is undertaking to house these illegals?

Mr. KING. Well, taxpayers in general don't like the amount of money that is being spent, essentially \$1,200 a cot per month and everything that goes with that, but I think people are more concerned about the elements that Ms. Williams was talking about, the impact on the community, the degradation of the park, and the lessening ability of our families to use the park.

Mr. ROSENDALE. And I can tell you, as a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I wish that this Administration was as concerned about caring for our veterans as they are for caring and spending the money and the investment on the illegal aliens that we are seeing now.

Mr. Chair, I see now over in the corner of my eye the clock, that I have exceeded my time, so I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Hunt, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUNT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Williams, are you a Democrat?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Yes, I am.

Mr. HUNT. It is safe to say that you and I probably don't agree on a whole host of policy issues, but I think that we could clearly see that the Biden administration, Governor Hochul, and Mayor Adams' actions have resulted in the destruction of our national borders and your national park, ma'am.

Texas, where I am born and raised and from and represent, begged the Federal Government to end its destructive policies 2

years before illegal aliens arrived in New York in the large numbers that you are seeing today. Those pleas fell on deaf ears. The issue rose to such a level that Texas took it upon itself to fulfill the Federal Government's role in defending our nation's border and the citizens of this great nation. Again, this is our job, not Governor Abbott's job.

What was our reward? We were sued by Biden's DOJ. So, even when we tried to defend our borders and enforce laws already on the books, we were stymied.

You have testified today that local residents are concerned that these issues are being ignored daily, and local residents repeatedly sought answers for simple questions concerning the potential rise in crime near Floyd Bennett Field. And those concerns, as you have articulated, fell on deaf ears.

Our national parks are the treasures of this country, and show the awe-inspiring landscape that God has granted the greatest country in the world. They should never be used as shelters to house thousands of Biden's illegal immigrants.

Ms. Morrissey, thank you again for being here, and thank you for your service to the City of New York. As a career law enforcement official, what are some of the problems New York leadership should have expected when they moved 2,000 people into Floyd Bennett Field?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you for asking that question.

First, I just want to add that I am not here to politicize political affiliations because I won't be here if I did think like that. I am here to represent my community and this problem that we have.

So, if we go back to before the migrants came to Floyd Bennett Field, if there was a sit-down conversation with all the elected officials, from the governor, to the mayor, and to the specific site which covers South Brooklyn, my district, and also South Queens, we could probably have come up with a better solution. Instead, it was just one or two individuals that made that decision, leaving out other local electeds at the table without any answers for their community.

And that is the problem, because we told them from Day 1 it is a flood zone area. There is no infrastructure, there is a lack of transportation, and the open elements, it is just not good. And we are talking about families, we are not talking about single men. We are talking about families that are housed in the middle of Floyd Bennett Field.

Next week, we are going into extreme heat weather. So, just think of having a 10 or 15 minute walk from there to wait for the bus to then go to a supermarket that is 5 miles away, right?

We know that the lease is coming up for renewal, and these are the same things that we are bringing back to the table because it hasn't changed. It has not changed.

And I understand they are here for the American dream, but at the same time we need to do the background checks, vet these individuals or these families so then they can move to the next step. Thank you.

Mr. HUNT. Of course. And again, I applaud that. This is not a political issue. I mean, we are on Capitol Hill, so this is politics, ma'am, but this is an American issue. This is something that we

could all come together to agree upon, that those are the minimum things that we should have done in advance to move into the field.

And one more follow-up question for you, ma'am. Prior to your public service you earned a master's degree in social work, and practiced in that field for more than 8 years. I thank you for your continued service. Falling back on your experience as a social worker and your professional opinion, what ramifications will the policies of the Biden administration, Governor Hochul, and Mayor Adams—what will it have on the next generation of New Yorkers, given your history and your field?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, I think there may be some trauma that is going to be included here with what is happening with the children being able to live in such conditions, with everything that is going on. I feel as though we have to do better. And where does it stop? Where does it stop?

Mr. HUNT. Thank you very much. I am out of time. But again, this is not a political issue. This is an American issue. And I applaud you for standing up, even though it might be against stream for what your colleagues might think. Thank you very much for being here.

Ms. WILLIAMS. You are welcome.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman from Texas. The gentlewoman from Virginia is next.

You are up for 5 minutes, Mrs. Kiggans.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I apologize for being late. I was in a meeting with the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security from Virginia, who was in my office just talking about the rise in fentanyl, the rise in terrorist activities, especially at our bases, which—Virginia is home to so many of just our national security interests in the form of the military.

So, listening to his concerns, and he made that trip to Congress to plead with me, what can be done about Virginia, we are not a border state, but we are such a border state right now, as every state in the country is. And I don't sit on this Subcommittee normally, but received permission to be here because it is an issue that I care so much about, and was in the whole Natural Resources Committee meeting when we talked about this, and we talked about the living conditions for the immigrants that are homed in these national parks, and I think my colleagues have done a great job just of describing why this is not acceptable and not conditions that we can continue.

But I wanted to start with Ms. Williams. Can you first tell me how many families, or maybe just how many people are living at Floyd Bennett Field right now?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Approximately 2,000.

Mrs. KIGGANS. OK. And what do those families, especially the children, it is summertime now. What do they do during the day?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, the summer is now approaching, but what I have seen firsthand during school hours in front of our CVS, local supermarkets, we would have a few families sit there with their children with signs and, which is even more horrific, stand in the middle of traffic on the medians, sometimes with babies strapped to their backs and toddlers or other school-aged children. They are going into traffic, trying to sell chocolate bars, or mangoes and

such, which is just quite dangerous. And we really don't need something severe to happen because I just don't know who will take responsibility for that.

Mrs. KIGGANS. So, you have seen an increase just in begging, and peddlers on the streets, then, for sure. And it sounds like unsafe conditions—

Ms. WILLIAMS. And door-knocking at all times, all hours of the night, as well.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Thank you just for being here, and for telling those of us who sit in Congress about exactly what is going on. It really sounds like the Biden administration is just not listening to you all, not doing right to your community.

But you and your constituents are living in the aftermath of this decision to build the migrant camp at Floyd Bennett Field. Since the camp opened, has the City of New York been willing to work with you at all about next steps, meaning the plans to close the camp after the lease expires in September? Are they not including you in the discussion?

Ms. WILLIAMS. I would wish that they would include me. As a matter of fact, I am not treated as such because I have decided to move forward on this platform. The communication is not transparent, and it is always kind of blocked. I am not allowed to go into Floyd Bennett Field without advance notice, so it is a little bit challenging.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Is there any form of communication that you can tell your concerns to the city? Can you write letters? Or what is your form of communication with them?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Of course, we have written letters. We have sent e-mails. We have done FOIA requests, a plethora of different things. And, again, just very little communication is given back.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Who do you write the letters to?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Our governor, Kathy Hochul, our mayor, Mayor Eric Adams. Also OEM and other electeds, as well, just to loop them in as to where we are going.

Mrs. KIGGANS. So, you can safely say that you feel like your needs are not being heard.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Absolutely, our needs are not being heard or met.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Thank you.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Hence why we are here.

Mrs. KIGGANS. And Mr. King and Ms. Morrissey, both of you, I would like to hear how you would characterize New York City's response to the ongoing migrant crisis.

And I will start with you, Mr. King.

Mr. KING. Well, as a civic leader, I find that we are very detached from what is going on. We have an excellent City Council Representative, but that is not where the decisions are being made. They are being pushed either from Albany and the Governor's office or from Gracie Mansion, and they are generally unresponsive to the needs of the community or try to downplay the impacts on the community because they just don't know what to do.

Again, I believe that part of the reason they are in Floyd Bennett Field is that they don't want these problems on the streets in Manhattan, where they can be seen. So, tuck them into our parks near our neighborhoods. And we are feeling the impacts, but there

is no responsiveness from New York City itself, from the government.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Is that why they chose that location of Floyd Bennett Field, because it is out of the way—

Mr. KING. Well, as someone who lives in the outer boroughs, I think that is always our suspicion, that if there is a problem in Manhattan, people they don't want to be in the streets of Manhattan, they will find a way to put them in the edges of Brooklyn and Queens, and without services to support them usually.

Mrs. KIGGANS. And I understand that you have experienced negotiating a lease with the National Park Service on behalf of Rockaway Little League to allow children to play baseball at Gateway National Recreation Area, of which Floyd Bennett Field is a part. Is this correct?

Mr. KING. That is correct.

Mrs. KIGGANS. And can you describe your experience trying to secure opportunities for the children of Rockaway Little League to play at Gateway?

Mr. KING. I would love to, yes. I mean, we might be the only little league that actually is on Federal land. We built the fields, and after so many years they said, oh, you need a lease to be there. And that was quite contentious in the beginning, but we made the case that youth sports is part of your mission. And if we are bringing children into the park, we could be educating them, bringing them in. And we were told, well, that is not part of our vision or our plan for the park.

But we got our lease, and we are still there. They would like to move us out. But more recently one of the local soccer leagues, which also brings hundreds of kids into the park, wanted to make investments and upgrades, but they wanted to lease, and they were told, no, youth sports is not part of our vision or our plan for the park. And, obviously, folks in our area are shocked that youth sports doesn't belong in a recreation area, but a migrant camp does.

Mrs. KIGGANS. Wow. There are no words. They have denied leases to sports leagues that wanted to use the recreational area land and make improvements? You mentioned the soccer league.

Mr. KING. That is correct. The Youth Soccer League was—

Dr. GOSAR. The gentlelady is out of time.

Mrs. KIGGANS. OK. My time is expired. Thank you very much.

Dr. GOSAR. I appreciate it. Well, you got really into it, so thank you very, very much. The gentlelady from New York, Ms. Malliotakis, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. I want to thank you all for being here today. I very much appreciate you coming once again, particularly, my colleague from New York, Assemblywoman Williams. We are from different parties, but common sense is common sense. And this is an issue of public safety for the people of Brooklyn, of Queens, of Staten Island, Bronx, and Manhattan.

And we, as you know, Mr. Chairman, know that we have roughly 200,000 migrants in New York City. We don't know the exact number because the city shields this information from us. What we do know is just last week a Venezuelan migrant, who is a known gang

member, shot two NYPD officers. In fact, it happened in the district of somebody in this Committee. This person crossed into this country illegally from Texas in July, and his asylum case was dismissed by a Chicago court, and he has been living at a migrant shelter in New York City in Queens.

It is completely outrageous that we have a policy in place by this Administration allowing people who are gang members, drug traffickers, criminals to enter into our country. And then on top of it, you are asking the residents of New York, the hardworking taxpayers, to pay for them to be housed in their communities, living free. They are living in these shelters. Some of them are luxury hotels that have turned into shelters. Some are national parks that have been turned into shelters, as is the issue that we are discussing today, Floyd Bennett Field.

I want to highlight some of the concerns from the media, from individuals that have spoken to the media about spikes in robberies, that there have been arrests, crimes, concerns. We know that there has been panhandling, shoplifting. As a matter of fact, I pulled up some of the stats for the precinct in which Floyd Bennett Field is, and robbery is up over last year 35 percent. Car thefts are up 51 percent. Larceny up 29, to nearly 30 percent. Retail theft, which is a concern that the Assemblywoman expressed to me, up 60 percent. And then you have assaults that are up roughly 50 percent, hate crimes up 500 percent.

My first question is to the Assemblywoman, because I have had a hard time getting the actual statistics of people who are committing crimes that reside in the shelters. We know there were thousands of arrests, we know that much because some of the media finally got to the numbers.

Do you have any of that information, or is the city stonewalling you, as well? Because I put in a FOIA request to get this data when I found out that there were thousands of arrests already made of migrants living in our city, and then, when we saw the police officers being assaulted in Times Square, shot in Queens, multiple stabbings that have resulted in death, all right, that is what is happening in the media. Do you have the stats? Because the city won't allow them to cooperate with ICE to deport criminals, has the Mayor's office allowed the NYPD to give your office that information?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Well, back in January we did submit a FOIA request. We did get a response a week ago, and there was no information for them to give to us. But I do know for a fact there was a call on a strangulation that occurred at Floyd Bennett Field. There were some other issues, and those types of crimes are not being made available to the public, and not even NYPD in some cases can enter the tents. So, you have security guards making decisions on what they deem is a criminal activity, which is just madness.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. So, we all know that crime is taking place at these shelters because we are reading about it regularly in the newspapers, right? We are just trying to get a hold of those statistics. And I myself have also been stonewalled, unfortunately, by the city. I put in my own FOIA request after a letter I sent in October was ignored. In January, I sent in a FOIA request, said that I was

going to get the information in May and then, guess what? In May, they told me now August. So, they too are being very disingenuous with the public.

Mr. King, you are from that area. Could you talk a little bit about the concerns of some of the residents that you live with?

And can you also maybe talk about the taxpayers' concerns about having this national park being taken away from them, and the cost that this is coming to the City of New York, where you are seeing services cut for the hardworking citizens?

Mr. KING. Well, I think across not just Rockaway, but all across Brooklyn and Queens, people are upset because we have a lot of hurting citizens. And now, all of a sudden, we have services getting cut because the money has to come from somewhere. And they are paying an exorbitant amount of money, \$28.8 million or \$27.8 million to set this up.

But we definitely see negative effects in our community, as well. With summer coming, we will have more of the problems. We said in the beginning, we were afraid this would be a humanitarian crisis in the park that will spill into the neighborhoods. Now that summer is coming, that is going to be spilling more aggressively into Rockaway. And it is an area where we have very little police protection, we have very little services of any sorts, so it is a recipe for bad things to happen.

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Right. My time is expired. I don't know if we are going to be able to do another round, but I did have more questions.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, we can, but we can always submit those for the record. I am going to recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Ms. Morrissey, just yesterday we heard alarming reports that eight suspected migrant terrorists with possible ties to ISIS were arrested as part of a sting operation in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and, more notably, your New York City. According to the sources and the reporting, "all eight men crossed through the southern border into the United States and their criminal background checks came back clean when they crossed." One even used the CBP One app, which the Biden administration created to allow migrants to book appointments to claim asylum and enter our country.

According to sources, "Part of the investigation featured a wiretap which revealed one of the now arrested individuals talking about bombs." One of the sources stated, "Remember the Boston Marathon? I am afraid something like that might happen again, or worse."

To your understanding, is there a screening process or background check in place for the Fort Bennett Field migrant camp to ensure that certain migrants are not threats to the surrounding communities?

Ms. MORRISSEY. No, sir. There is nothing.

Dr. GOSAR. None whatsoever?

Ms. MORRISSEY. Nothing that I know of, no.

Dr. GOSAR. Ms. Williams, I know that when I was up there, it was going to be a man camp. Now, I understand it is families, right?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Correct.

Dr. GOSAR. In some ways I would say that is a little better, because you have all these children, all these youth activities out there, hockey, baseball, all those things. Right? I am from Wyoming, and they had oil and gas man camps. And I know they are not really all that fun, but I think women and children might be a little better. However, tarmac gets hot and radiates heat, does it not?

Ms. WILLIAMS. It does, very much so, especially Floyd Bennett Field.

Dr. GOSAR. Wow. It doesn't take very much of a resource to know that a child can be dehydrated instantaneously almost, right?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Especially walking from that tent to get the bus service off of Flatbush can be excruciating.

Dr. GOSAR. Ms. Morrissey, does it concern you, the proximity of this camp to so many in your communities and to your police department's response time?

Ms. MORRISSEY. Yes, it does concern me because, if you read in the newspapers and see that our police resources are at low manpower already, and having all these additional forces, all the migrants coming in, it is going to be a huge strain on our first responders.

And being a retired NYPD lieutenant, I also feel that from actually working at that base, aviation, there is also a police site there. It is an emergency service site that our police officers come out. Besides the concern of the crime and the heat from actually doing RMP training there, that tarmac gets very, very hot. I know that for a fact. It is very hot on that.

And as for crime, we are maxed out. There are not enough officers citywide, never mind in the smaller commands. So, it is a great concern.

Dr. GOSAR. Well, even the police may have some advantages or disadvantages, but it is a legal system that just puts them back out on the field. They create a bigger problem for you.

I know something about heat. In fact, my friend, Andy Biggs, and I were on a tarmac in Phoenix. And I know Phoenix gets a little hotter than New York, but probably not much. All of a sudden, we heard this ping, ping, ping. What it was was his shoes were falling apart. They were shooting off the plastic. They got so hot they just shot off. That is pretty impressive when you are talking about heat. Very hot.

Ms. Williams, go ahead.

Ms. WILLIAMS. Mr. Chairman, can I just add? I mean, these are such valid points, and Floyd Bennett Field is 4 miles away from Kings Plaza Mall that is open to the public. And we have seen in the last few months, especially during the holiday time, so many families in there panhandling, making it a very uncomfortable situation, playing at the heartstrings of families, and so forth. And as a parent myself, it was very difficult to see that.

But as the weather gets warmer, as well, I mean, we can't even imagine how such a public place will be filled with so many individuals seeking probably a warmer place to relax.

Dr. GOSAR. Yes, well, what we are going to do is go to the gentleman from New York, and then the Ranking Member and then

I am going to ask you one more last question instead of doing a second round.

I will just wait. How about that? We will just go to Mr. D'Esposito for 5 minutes from New York.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Committee for allowing me to waive on.

Ms. Fischer, I would like to direct my first line of questioning to you. In your summary of your opening statement, in the second paragraph, it says, "Amnesty International is a Nobel Prize-winning global human rights organization committed to fighting for the human rights of all people, no matter where they are or where they are from."

The third paragraph says, "Our vision is of a world in which every person enjoys all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments." It sounds very promising.

My question to you is, do you think that what is happening right now in the United States of America under the failed policies of Joe Biden and Secretary Mayorkas, do you believe that it is the responsibility of Americans, do you believe that it is the responsibility of New Yorkers to foot the bill of individuals coming into this country illegally?

Ms. FISCHER. Thank you so much for that question. I think what we have seen is actually decades of failed policies that have invested billions of dollars.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. With all due respect, I only have 5 minutes, and we are not going to talk about the years and decades of failed immigration policy. What we are going to talk about today are the failed policies, the border security failed policies of Joe Biden.

So, my question is very simple. It is a yes-or-no question. Do you believe that the American people, do you believe that New Yorkers should foot the bill for people coming into this country illegally?

Ms. FISCHER. Seeking asylum is a right under U.S. law. So, I think the question is a little bit flawed, but what I am suggesting is that—

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. It is not flawed, because seeking asylum, coming into this country and seeking asylum is when you do it the correct and legal way.

Ms. FISCHER. The U.S. law allows for people to seek asylum, regardless of their—

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. When people cross our borders—

Mr. FISCHER [continuing]. Manner of entry, and the—

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. I will reclaim my time. When people cross borders, and they come here illegally and, more importantly, specific to what we are talking about today, when they come here and commit crimes, and then they are released—well, that is not the failed policies of Joe Biden, it is the failed policies of Governor Hochul in New York State—they commit crimes and they are released to commit more crimes.

What we are talking about today is Floyd Bennett Field. Have you ever visited Floyd Bennett Field?

Ms. FISCHER. No, sir, I have not.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Well, I will tell you that in your opening statement that you submitted, your vision is of a world in which every

person enjoys all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration. I will tell you that, having worked as an NYPD detective for over 16 years and visited Floyd Bennett Field many times, as someone who has spent his entire life living in New York City and traveled in and out of JFK airport routinely, I will tell you two things.

First, Floyd Bennett Field and JFK Airport, neither one of them is a world in which you enjoy human rights. People living in an empty warehouse at JFK Airport, that is not the human rights that they risked their life to come here for.

Ms. FISCHER. I wholeheartedly agree with that.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. At Floyd Bennett Field, which is in close proximity to not only military operations, but special operations of the New York City Police Department, not only is that not where they should be living, but it is also not safe.

Ms. FISCHER. I agree with that statement.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. And that is just mind boggling, that we continue to allow people into this country illegally, and then we, the United States of America and the people who pay taxes, have to foot the bill for them to come here to not only live and eat and have cell phones, I mean, we have heard stories of people coming across the southern border. The moment that they cross over and they touch base with asylum, they are on their phone getting an Uber to wherever they want to go. Literally, there have been Ubers that sit on the southern border, waiting to take people places.

My next line of questioning, I only have a minute left, is to Ms. Morrissey.

First of all, thank you for your service to the NYPD. We are both retired. Obviously, we know what it takes to keep people safe and protect our communities. These are disastrous policies. And as the summer approaches, where we see crime skyrocket, because that is what happens, when it gets nicer out there are more crimes that are committed—do you believe that the migrants committing crimes now surrounding Floyd Bennett Field will contribute to the summer crime season?

Ms. MORRISSEY. Absolutely, because the heat and living in close proximity to each other in a very hot tent is going to cause violence with themselves and their surrounding neighborhoods, including everyone.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. And I would assume you, Mr. King, Ms. Williams, and others have expressed these concerns, correct?

Ms. MORRISSEY. Yes.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. I really do hope they are heard, because the American people are paying the price for the Biden border crisis. And it is a shame.

With that, my time has expired, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Dr. GOSAR. I thank the gentleman from New York. The gentleman from New Mexico is recognized for her 5 minutes.

We are going to ask one round. She is going to ask one question.

Ms. STANSBURY. All right. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

These House Natural Resources Committee hearings are always an interesting fever dream, and I welcome my colleagues from New York to the House Natural Resources Committee. This is not a City Council meeting for New York City. This is not a State Assembly

hearing in the New York State Assembly. And this is also not a committee that has jurisdiction over immigration or international affairs. We are here because we have stewardship over our lands, waters, and wildlife.

And there has been a lot of strange misinformation provided here today, but one thing that I do think is helpful for the public to know is that part of the role and responsibility of Members of Congress is to serve their communities, to do casework. And we had three Members of New York's delegation here today.

Please follow up with your Members of Congress. They can help facilitate conversations with our Federal agencies. That is our job. That is actually why we are here. So, we don't need to have fake hearings that are about political issues. It is really about just facilitating those kind of conversations.

I do want to correct the record on a few things, and then I will turn it over for a quick question.

First of all, there was a comment made about veterans. We have had the largest expansion of veterans benefits ever in American history in the last Congress, with the passing of the PACT Act and the eligibility of 3 million more veterans to qualify for that.

There has been a lot of misinformation about how immigration and asylum works. Most of the people who are currently being housed in various places by the places where they are being received have already been screened at the border. In fact, that is our policy, and they have been screened to be safe.

Of course, there is always violence that occurs in our communities, but they also are awaiting asylum hearings in the asylum system. And if our friends across the aisle would like to fix the immigration system, fund our programs and pass bipartisan immigration reform and work on these issues. Don't hold political hearings, but actually get to work on the issues that the American people care about and that are impacting so clearly our communities.

But Assemblywoman, I really appreciated some of the comments you made earlier about humane solutions and about collaboration, and I understand very much the challenge of working with the Federal bureaucracy. All of our communities struggle with it. And certainly, we are committed to helping support and work out issues so that there is better coordination. But we don't have jurisdiction over the state or the city here.

But because we are here talking about immigration, about what to do with the populations who are here in our communities, I want to start with Ms. Fischer, and then I would love to ask Ms. Williams, as well.

What do you see as being some of the ways in which we can fix the existing systems to help get people through the asylum system faster to more humanely house people, to make sure that families are safe in the spaces where they are living in the interim, and to make sure that our communities have a say in the process?

I will start with Ms. Fischer and then turn to Ms. Williams.

MS. FISCHER. Thank you so much for that question. I think that answer actually starts here with Federal coordination. It is really not feasible for just one or two cities, like New York and Chicago, to receive such high numbers of new arrivals. With Federal coordi-

nation, we can ensure that new arrivals that do not already have ties to the United States have the opportunity to go places that are facing labor shortages, population decline, and can benefit from a boost of new workers.

People also need the ability to work. Asylum seekers are only able to receive work permits once their asylum applications have been pending for 6 months. That needs to be sped up. If we take the example of Carla, who I spoke about in my opening statement, it took her months of doing the hair and nails of people in her shelter to save up the thousands of dollars she needed to pay for an immigration attorney to then file for asylum, and then start the clock to wait the 6 months for her work permit, which obviously delayed their ability to move out of shelters and into independence.

And, again, what we need is a system that provides people the ability to come here safely, in a dignified manner, and support services to help them navigate their cases in immigration court. These solutions have not only proven to be more effective at helping people comply with their immigration requirements, they also will save taxpayers' dollars and bolster local economies.

Ms. STANSBURY. OK, Assemblywoman Williams, again, the question is really, for individuals that are already here and that do need housing, how can there be better collaboration and support for the communities that are hosting these folks and helping to make sure that there are safe and humane environments for folks to start their next chapter?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Thank you. There definitely has to be a dialogue with all the electeds at the table. That is a start in the right direction for a better solution, No. 1, that opportunity was not given to us 9 months ago, so moving forward.

And the best thing we can do for those families at Floyd Bennett Field is not to renew the lease and try to do something better, whether it is open up the rest of the state, have them vetted much quicker, because we know for sure that not everyone who is seeking asylum is going to be granted that status.

And I just want to piggyback a little bit when we talk about the vetting process and it is done at the border. Well, I really wondered what happened with the eight individuals that were arrested, didn't they go through that vetting process, too? Because for us in South Brooklyn, we do have a shopping mall that thousands and thousands of people visit every day. And God forbid, something crazy had happened, how that could have been a place of an attack or something.

So, we have to do better, but everyone has to be at the table. It can't be a one-way conversation, and then the local electeds are left in the dark to answer to their constituents, because most times the local electeds have more interaction with their local constituency.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Madam Assemblywoman. And it is unfortunate that your Members of Congress left before they could hear that.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. GOSAR. You are certainly welcome.

First of all, I wanted to address the jurisdictional issue. This is the Oversight Committee of Natural Resources. That means everything is on the table, whether it be national parks, whether it be

public lands, whether it be minerals and oil and gas. It all is part of our jurisdiction.

Now, carefully, I am going to ask you each what was the question you were prepared to hear, didn't hear, and what is the answer to that question?

We will start with you, Ms. Williams. What was the question you were prepared to answer, it wasn't asked, and what was its answer?

Ms. WILLIAMS. Many questions were asked, but one of the things we spoke about is the summer months coming up, and that is going to be very, very excruciating with the heat. And how are those tents going to be cooled down? They are going to be run by generators that use diesel, and that is going to be running 24 hours a day for the entire summertime.

We are talking about the pollution. We are talking about so many different things. When you think about the climate aspect, quality of air and so forth, it is just not good for the families because we have seen children playing soccer outside of the tents, and those generators going 24 hours a day, letting out those fumes. How is that impacting the families or the children that are playing soccer or using their scooters right outside the premise of the tent?

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you.

You are next.

Mr. KING. Yes, in addition to being a civic leader, I am a businessman in Rockaway. I have been a partner for 30 years. So, a question about the economic impact on our businesses and on the workforce.

We have spoken a bit about the shoplifting. I mean, there are also situations, really throughout Queens, where migrants are taking the stuff they have gotten for free, and they are selling it on the street in front of stores, and our retail operations are already struggling. They don't need the competition, or to have the front of their stores being difficult for customers to get to. So, it has been bad for business, but it has been worse for working-class and poor New Yorkers.

You guys know New York is a very expensive place to live. It is painfully worse with all the inflation we have had the last few years. So, if you are working, you are not even paycheck to paycheck. You are doing odd jobs, putting cash in your pocket. All of a sudden, we have an influx of hundreds of thousands of people in a labor glut. It drives down prices when we need our workers to be able to get better prices. So, you have people who are struggling to get by who either can't make money at all, or they have to fight to accept less money because a migrant who is living in Floyd Bennett Field doesn't have the overhead that an American citizen has.

So, it has been bad for people on the business side, both the businesses themselves and our working-class Americans.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. King.

Ms. Fischer?

Ms. FISCHER. I will add to that a little bit. I think what I would want to sort of lift up is that the new arrivals can be a real boon to local economies. There are economists that have estimated that

for every thousand newly-arrived workers, initial state and local tax revenues are expected to increase by \$2.5 million.

Economists also estimate that a 10 percent reduction in asylum seekers in a single year would be an \$8.9 billion loss to the U.S. economy, and over \$1.5 billion in lost tax revenues in 5 years. So, I think this idea that the new arrivals are a drain on the local economy is actually misaligned with what I think mountains of economic evidence is able to show.

Dr. GOSAR. Thank you.

Ms. Morrissey?

Ms. MORRISSEY. I feel our quality of life. And most important, something that we are overlooking right now is our own children. Kids are passing the migrant children selling in the middle of the summer on a median in the heat with their parents when they are coming from school. Explaining mentally for the children of the neighborhood what is going on. While they are going to the beach they are seeing children standing there. And I feel it is hard for them, as parents, to explain this to children, the begging, and seeing them when they are going to avoid people in the stores, and everything like that being rushed, and the parents' fear, and feeling the fear the parents are having.

So, I feel the mental and the quality of life is extremely crucial. And right now it is affecting everyone, from the elderly being fearful to go in the parking lots, to the parents rushing their children along quickly to avoid any kind of conflict. And some don't even understand what is going on. We are taught different. We are taught to help, but we can't help. It is over-running the neighborhood, and it is crucial that something be done.

It is cruel, what is being done, leaving children, families, on tarmacs in the heat. The line between right and wrong is very gray right now, and it is very hard to explain.

Dr. GOSAR. Ms. Morrissey, I love your comment at the very end there. There isn't a broken system. It is we are not enforcing the law. If there are things that have to be changed once the law is enforced, then you can change them. But you can't just change the goalposts.

So, from that standpoint, I want to thank all of our witnesses for coming so far and for your expert testimony. There may be some additional questions for the witnesses, and we will ask you to respond to those in writing.

Under Committee Rule 3, members of the Committee must submit questions to the Subcommittee Clerk by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, June 18. The hearing record will be open for 10 days for your responses.

If there is no further business, the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:37 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

[ADDITIONAL MATERIALS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD]

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Gosar**NEW YORK STATE
Homeland Security and Emergency Services**

June 11, 2024

Chairman Gosar
 House Committee on Natural Resources
 Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee
 1324 Longworth House Office Building
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gosar:

The State of New York has worked to support New York City ("City") throughout the migrant crisis to ensure individuals arriving in the City are provided temporary shelter in accordance with City requirements. With more than 100,000 individuals flowing into New York State over the last year and more than 65,000 currently being sheltered by the City, the State continues to provide fiscal support to the City's on-going response operation.

Beginning in early 2023, the State submitted requests to the federal government, on behalf of the City, for the use federal lands for expanded temporary shelter. Following discussions with the Department of Interior, the City and federal government executed a contract to allow New York City to utilize Floyd Bennett Field as a shelter for more than 2,000 migrants and asylum seekers. The lease for the use of Floyd Bennett Field (the "Lease") is between the United States of America acting through the National Park Service ("NPS"), as Lessor, and the City of New York (the "City"), as Lessee. As we understand it, the terms of the Lease were driven by the statutory and regulatory powers and obligations of NPS. The State of New York (the "State") is not a party to the Lease, nor did the State negotiate the terms of the Lease. Rather, in order to assist the City in ameliorating the migrant crisis, the State agreed, through a separate agreement with the City, to pay on behalf of the City all rent obligations set forth in the Lease. The Lease, which commenced on September 15, 2023 and expires on September 14, 2024, requires over the course of the one-year term the payment of \$20,805,000 in Monthly Rent and \$7,000,000 in Management and Oversight Rent. In addition, to support the City's provision of shelter and services to migrant persons, the State agreed to reimburse the City for all necessary expenses up to \$383 per bed per night for up to 2,000 beds.

The Lease requires the City to make the following improvements to the property: (i) rehabilitate the historic entrance to Floyd Bennett Field; (ii) repair approximately 12,000 lineal feet of main access routes, including include making repairs to roadways, planting native tree planting, and installing landscaping; (iii) make site improvements to the approximately 770,000 square foot Historic Hangar B parking lot and RV camping sites; (iv) upgrade the existing 30 public camping sites and clear and grub an additional 30 sites, including making improvements by adding signage, removing invasive trees and vegetation, installing fire rings and picnic tables at each site, regrading the access trail, and building a new permanent restroom facility; and (v) improve the area around Building 272 to support the development of an outdoor education campus, including clearing invasive plant materials, constructing permeable walking trails, rehabilitating the existing greenhouse, installing a new parking area, and adding visitor amenities. The City may use up to \$14,400,000 of the Monthly Rent to cover the cost of these improvements.

As Congress considers its next steps in providing additional funding and authorities to address the global migration currently challenging the nation's immigration system, the State of New York will continue to support New York City in deploying City and State resources and staff to provide humanitarian assistance to individuals in the New York City shelter system.

JACKIE BRAY,
Commissioner

NEW YORK CITY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

June 12, 2024

Hon. Paul Gosar, Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Gosar:

Pursuant to the request for testimony regarding the use of Floyd Bennett Field by New York City agencies, we are happy to provide information regarding our posture during this unprecedented emergency.

Through preparedness, education, and response, New York City Emergency Management helps New Yorkers before, during, and after emergencies. The agency is responsible for coordinating citywide emergency planning and response for all types and sizes of emergencies. Our agency is staffed by more than 250 dedicated professionals with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, including individuals detailed from other City agencies. We work to identify the essential partners, personnel, and resources needed for effective response, including city, state, and federal government agencies as well as a broad array of partners in the private, non-profit, health care, and utility sectors. Emergency Managements' coordination efforts are a critical piece of a broader multiagency response to this national humanitarian crisis. We act as the central coordinator when it comes to emergency response, ensuring that resources are available for our partners, and serving New Yorkers in what can be their worst days with skill and compassion.

Since April 2022, New York City has been leading the country's response to the migrant emergency, providing critical support to over 200,000 individuals who have sought refuge and received assistance from our system. New York City is projected to spend more than \$4 billion on asylum seeker operations. With thousands of migrants and asylum seekers arriving each month, every day is an all-out sprint as our teams work diligently to open new sites, operate existing emergency shelters and respite centers, and find placements for new arrivals. We are a city shouldering the weight of a national crisis, which is stretching the limits of our physical space and resources. However, we remain committed to upholding the values of compassion, efficiency, and accountability as we navigate this complex humanitarian crisis. The Adams Administration is proud to have engineered the first-in-the-nation Asylum Application Help Center, which opened last summer. Since its inception, we have opened three satellite sites while partnering with nonprofits, law firms, and the state and federal government. We have also provided health care, education, work training, jobs, legal support and much, much more. This is a story of New York City stepping up, and managing, and doing everything possible. For the last two years we have led with care and compassion, and we have not and will not lose sight of the extraordinary scale of this emergency. As it stands, currently the City is operating over 200 sites across all five boroughs, including 15 humanitarian relief centers, and we have helped submit over 50,000 applications for asylum, temporary protected status (TPS), and work authorization.

The City has been able to provide all new arrivals with shelter because of the flexibility we have had to open sites quickly. Some of those sites have not looked like traditional homeless shelters because emergency situations require creative solutions. We have sheltered people in gyms, already shuttered parochial schools, warehouses, NYPD facilities, commercial buildings, an airplane hangar, and closed or unused university buildings. In order to make these spaces safe and suitable for guests, we have had to repair elevators, rent shower trailers, contend with failing plumbing, and retrofit heating and cooling systems, and ensure accessibility issues for those with access and functional needs. After appealing to state and federal partners for additional support, including shelter space and sites, we were provided with approximately 30 acres of Floyd Bennett Field—less than 8 percent of the park's 387 acres. Most of the shelter is constructed on a portion of an unused runway and parking lot. The New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services provided the necessary requirements for this type of configuration, and Floyd Bennett Field meets the specifications they laid out.

Opening Floyd Bennett Field was necessary, and in order to make it a safe place for families with children to reside, we have solved for hazards including high winds and flooding. We developed protocols for evacuation and built a pedestrian walkway to connect the base camp to a major thoroughfare. We meet weekly with the National Park Service to address issues as they arise. We spend an immense amount of time and resources to minimize our impact on the park and maximize safety of the guests.

It is important the federal government remains committed to helping states and local government combat the humanitarian crisis. When refugees from Europe arrived after World War II, from Vietnam in the 1970s, and from Cuba in the 1980s, the federal government ran large scale programs to provide immediate healthcare needs of new arrivals, screen out individuals posing security risks, and relocate people across the United States—where they went on to make massive contributions to American society and the economy. Without comprehensive immigration reform passed by Congress, this crisis has largely been left to cities and local jurisdictions to shoulder alone.

We cannot emphasize enough that this is a national crisis that demands a national response, namely meaningful action from Congress. This crisis has been, from the start, a true interagency effort, and we will continue to work with our partners to provide assistance and coordination. We are grateful for the support of those willing to work with us and that of the many elected officials who know that new immigrants have and will continue to enrich our communities.

Sincerely,

ZACH ISCOL,
Commissioner

Appendix: Operational Information on the Base Camp at Floyd Bennett Field

Is the Floyd Bennett Field Humanitarian Center safe?

We put the health and safety of asylum seekers—and most importantly children seeking asylum—above all else. Floyd Bennett Field Humanitarian Center staff work around the clock to ensure guest wellbeing and that guests sleep in safe temperatures and receive three meals each day.

In keeping with our commitment to public safety of guests and workers at Floyd Bennett Field Humanitarian Center, NYCEM has established temporary relocation plans for the center in the event of an emergency. In the event of a relocation, our security and operations team at FBF ensures thorough accounting for all individuals, including searches, communication strategies, and tracking methods like scanning individuals to the temporary shelter upon arrival. NYCEM executives are well-trained in evacuation protocols and managing temporary shelters, including supervising contractors and providing clear instructions for safe evacuation processes. While the city retains operational responsibility for FBF under the lease agreement, we maintain open communication with federal and state partners regarding major city emergencies and basecamp concerns. General plans are always in place should we need to evacuate any shelter or site NYC Emergency Management builds or operates, enabling us to respond swiftly. Through our 24/7 Watch Command facility, we are always monitoring weather, hazards and other conditions throughout the city looking out for any potential problems affecting New York City, and asylum seeker sites in particular.

How much of Floyd Bennett Field does the base camp shelter take up?

The City's lease is for approximately 30 acres of Floyd Bennett Field, which comprises less than 10% of the park's total 387 acres. Much of the base camp is on top of a retired runway and hangar parking lot.

How do asylum seekers staying at the Floyd Bennett Field Humanitarian Center get to the city for school, work, or other services?

In order for migrants and asylum seekers to become self-sufficient, taxpaying members of American society, they need work permits. Though we can provide services like free transportation, it is on Congress to pass legislation that grants these individuals the legal status they need in order to start building a life outside of our humanitarian centers and support themselves and to provide the resources

and authorities needed to expedite asylum and other immigration processing and procedures.

Are people still able to visit Floyd Bennett Field for recreational purposes?

Yes. Our base camp is clearly defined and bordered, leaving the other roughly 357 acres of the park available for public use.

What if you damage the parkland?

We will leave the park better off than we found it. As a condition of our lease of Floyd Bennett Field, we are making up to \$14.4 million in investments to improve the park. The projects include: rehabilitating the historic front entrance to the visitor center, repairing over 12,000 feet of roadways and runways, removing debris and invasive plants, renovating 12 RV and 30 regular camping sites, and developing a seven-acre outdoor education campus in partnership with Outward Bound Schools NYC.

Submissions for the Record by Rep. Stansbury

AYUDA SOCIAL SERVICES

“Reina”—Ayuda Client Story: Defensive Asylum Grant

Reina* is a 29-year-old transgender woman from Honduras. In her home country, it was impossible for her to express her gender identity safely. Her defensive asylum case was based on a near-death beating inflicted on her by military and police as punishment for publicly presenting as a trans woman. She sought refuge in the U.S. and eventually, the D.C. metropolitan area. Ayuda is a nonprofit based in the D.C. area that provides legal, social, and language access services to help low-income immigrants access justice. Ayuda attorneys represented Reina in her defensive asylum case and prepared an over 700-page filing with extensive country conditions on the treatment of transgender individual in Honduras. Reina was able to overcome significant trauma to prepare a detailed declaration and give brief but compelling testimony. The government agreed to a grant of asylum.

Reina would have certainly been killed if returned to her home country. We are privileged to have her as a member of our community. She has given so much of her time and energy to caring for others around D.C. and has grown into an incredible advocate for transgender rights.

Today, Reina continues receiving gender-affirming medical care that would have been impossible in her home country. She has a blooming career in fashion and television. A telenovela she is acting in just premiered this summer. Reina is overjoyed to be able to pursue her dreams without fear of deportation to a country where her safety and life were at risk. Reina’s newfound safety and stability, thanks in large part to the work of the Ayuda attorneys who represented her in her asylum case, demonstrate the critical importance of supportive services for asylum seekers. Her life-changing journey and her positive contributions to our community demonstrate the critical importance of this nation remaining a welcoming place for those seeking safety at our border.

Selena’s Story: Celebrating U Visa Success After 6 Years

June 6, 2023

Everyone has their own reason for immigrating. When former Ayuda client Selena* fled her home country in Central America after surviving domestic violence, her reason for coming to the United States was simple: Safety—for herself and her children.

Shortly after arriving in the U.S., Selena entered a romantic relationship with a man named Patrick.* But once he began to abuse her both emotionally and physically, Selena was done. She made the courageous decision to end the relationship.

Patrick, however, had other plans. He began stalking Selena, posting intimate photos of her online, and generally making her feel unsafe. Selena kept her composure and reported his crimes to law enforcement. With Ayuda’s assistance, in 2016 she began the process of applying for a U Visa, which allows victims of certain severe crimes and their family members to legally remain in the U.S.

Although the U Visa is one of the strongest legal protections available for immigrant survivors of sexual assault or domestic violence, it comes with built-in roadblocks. For one thing, U Visas are only granted if the survivor complies with “reasonable requests” from law enforcement. In Selena’s case, she was called on to testify at her abuser’s trial. Despite the intense, combative questions that Patrick’s counsel threw Selena’s way, she ultimately prevailed. Her abuser has been convicted.

But the best part: Selena has been granted her U Visa after a long six years of waiting and can safely continue her path to recovery. Today, Selena is happily living with her two children after getting remarried last year.

A 20-Year Journey to Citizenship: Tanya’s Story

Tanya* was a young adult when she experienced political persecution in her home country. In search of freedom, she accepted a job as a domestic worker in a foreign country. Unfortunately, Tanya’s escape was short-lived, as her new employers subjected her to human trafficking.

After the traffickers brought her to the U.S., Tanya once again escaped—only to be failed by the immigration bureaucracy. Her asylum application was denied in

*All names have been changed to protect the client’s identity.

immigration court. It wasn't until several years later, working with an immigration attorney who recognized her as a survivor of human trafficking, that Tanya was granted a T Visa in 2008.

But T Visas are temporary and only allow survivors of trafficking to stay in the U.S. for up to 4 years. In 2011, Tanya began working with Ayuda to ensure her long-term safety by seeking lawful permanent residency. A year later, her case was a success. On top of her residency victory, Ayuda also helped Tanya reopen and terminate her previous immigration case—a necessary step to one day apply for citizenship.

In 2022, Tanya was ready to become a citizen. With Ayuda's representation, she applied for naturalization. Tanya's hard work and studying paid off last month, when she passed her English and civics tests on the first try.

This week, over 10 years after becoming a permanent resident and over 20 years after she escaped her traffickers, Tanya will take the Oath of Allegiance and become a U.S. Citizen.

All of us at Ayuda are celebrating Tanya's success and wishing her the best as she starts this next chapter.

Teen Trafficking Survivor Finds Safety with Ayuda: Elias' Story

July 19, 2023

Elias* was 16 when he arrived in the U.S. from Guatemala as an unaccompanied minor. He'd taken the risky journey hoping to reconnect with his mother stateside, whom he hadn't seen since birth. Upon arriving in the D.C. area, Elias connected with Ayuda for a helping hand with his goals: enrolling in school, getting health insurance, and securing his legal status.

But at home, Elias was not having the happy reunion he'd imagined with his mom. She was forcing him to work in demolition and confiscating all of his earnings. She cycled through threats to kick him out of the house, frequently taking his phone to ensure he couldn't reach his safety net.

After several months, Elias took the challenging step of recognizing his mother's behavior for what it was: Labor trafficking and abuse. He confided to his Ayuda case manager, who immediately reported the treatment to Child Protective Services (CPS) and began working to get him out of his home.

Finding Elias safe shelter, however, was a challenge in itself. He desperately needed refuge from his mother's house, but many emergency housing programs only have beds for women or survivors of sex trafficking. His case manager knocked on dozens of doors, to no avail. Finally, Ayuda was able to pay for Elias' stay at a hotel while coordinating a more long-term solution.

Elias was understandably scared but remained unshakeable throughout the process—never losing his infectious sense of humor. He put Ayuda in touch with his uncle based in the Midwest, who was more than willing to provide his nephew a safe home. After coordinating between CPS, Elias' mom, and his school, our case manager purchased him a bus ticket, a winter coat, and food for the journey. Finally, Elias and the case manager made a safety plan for traveling and future communications with his mother.

Today, Elias has been living with his uncle for over a year. He's attending high school, has a job, and is working with a local immigration attorney. Most importantly, Elias reports feeling happier and much more peaceful in his new home.

Protection through Pro Bono: Ruka's Story

Ruka* was in the United States on a tourists' visa visiting from her home country in Asia, when she first met Donald.* A restaurant owner, he promised Ruka that she could be included in a visa application that would grant her permanent residency in the U.S. It sounded like a dream, so Ruka leapt at the opportunity.

As the visa application was allegedly processing, Donald required her to work at the restaurant. He also made her pay thousands of dollars in legal fees. Ruka had no way of knowing that, in fact, federal immigration laws obligate the employer to pay these fees. With no other option, she agreed to pay.

But after Ruka had come up with the exorbitant fees, Donald changed her duties in the restaurant and eventually ceased paying her, requiring her to work only for tips as a server. A short time later, Ruka's dilemma became unbearable when Donald demanded another \$10,000 for the visa application. He even threatened to remove her from the application if she did not pay or continue to work.

Ruka stood her ground, refusing to give in to Donald's demands. His retaliation was brutal. Well aware that Ruka was now only paid in tips, Donald placed her to work in the kitchen, where she'd be unable receive gratuity from customers.

Fortunately, Ruka was soon able to flee the trafficking situation and reported Donald's crimes to the authorities. She connected with Ayuda's pro bono program and worked with volunteer attorneys to apply for both a T Visa and a U Visa. (What's a T Visa?)

During every step of the process, Ruka's pro bono attorneys were guided by Ayuda staff attorneys to assist with the unquities of immigration law. In December 2022, Ruka received the good news: her T Visa had been approved, allowing her to safely remain in the U.S. for the near future.

Furthermore, since Ruka's initial police report, Donald has pled guilty to human trafficking—ensuring that no one else will endure what she went through at his hands. Ruka is happy to have won her case and hopes that sharing her story will help someone else in her situation.

Zoila's Story: Social Work Breaks Barriers

March 7, 2023

During March we observe Social Work Month to celebrate the powerful impact of Ayuda's Social Services team. These dedicated individuals work with immigrant clients to identify their unique needs and goals and navigate resources in their communities. Social Work is difficult to describe because it looks so different for everyone. Zoila's story below is just one example of how social services uplifts survivors and those who could use a helping hand.

Thank you, Ayuda Social Services team!

Zoila, an immigrant mother of two, first connected with Ayuda in March 2022. She had recently survived domestic violence and was experiencing economic hardship, with a baby on the way. Ayuda's Social Services team met her with our helping hand extended.

Senior Case Manager Diana Fitz and her colleagues connected Zoila with financial assistance, so that she could create stability in her life. To prepare for welcoming her little one, Zoila joined Ayuda's Nursery Project, which gave her access to all the newborn essentials. Her family has also been able to count on Ayuda's pantry and diaper bank since the new baby arrived.

In the last year, Zoila has been making progress on her road to recovery. She's participated in therapy through Ayuda's support group, as well as different self-improvement workshops, to help her reach a healthy mental space in life.

With Ayuda's support, Zoila has been able to set goals and thrive. Her dream is to start a food truck business, and she will soon work with the social services team to start applying for the necessary certification. The entire Ayuda team is excited for the day we will get to taste Zoila's cuisine!

June 18, 2024

Re: GreenLatinos Opposition to H.R. 5283

While the proposed intent to protect America's public lands is admirable, H.R. 5283—Protecting our Communities from Failure to Secure the Border Act of 2023—proposes false solutions for public land management and misdirects blame to immigrants seeking their right to asylum. Rather than scapegoat undocumented people, we encourage the bill sponsor, Rep. Malliotakis (NY), and Congress to robustly fund Federal land management agencies—a critical impediment to properly stewarding the hundred of thousands of conservation, recreation and historic units under federal jurisdiction—and swiftly work together on compassionate and humanitarian immigrant reception and integration policies.

In an August 2023 report titled “Deferred Maintenance of Federal Land Management Agencies: FY 2013-FY2022 Estimates and Issues”, the Congressional Research Service forcefully demonstrates that every federal land management agency is severely and chronically underfunded. Specifically, the report finds that in FY 2022 the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and U.S. Forest Service had a combined deferred maintenance estimate of \$35.53 billion. A staggering 59% of this \$35.53 billion, or \$21.09 billion represents the total maintenance backlog of the National Park Service. Additionally, in every year analyzed, the National Park Service had the “largest portion of total deferred maintenance and considerably more than any other agency.”

It is the position of GreenLatinos that land management agencies should be robustly funded to manage and steward public lands. Yet U.S. House of Representatives leadership in this 118th Congress consistently act to defund agencies responsible for administering public lands. The House FY24 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill proposed a \$2,654,000,000 budget for the operation of the National Park Service, nearly just 46% of the actualized NPS budget of \$4,724,284,000 actualized for FY24. Even with existing NPS funding levels, the Agency does not have adequate resources to address the deferred maintenance estimate which forces the Agency to consider alternative agreements to address maintenance needs on a site by site basis as was done between the City of New York and the National Park Service for Floyd Bennett Field.

In the backdrop of minimal federal funding appropriation, the agreement between the City of New York and the National Park Service was designed to ensure financial gain for the stewardship of Floyd Bennett Field via paid rent. The agreement secures resources for certain improvements of the site that would contribute to long-term visitor use and enjoyment of the site. (source).

Moreover, there are a host of activities such as logging, mining, and other energy extraction which directly lead to habitat loss and pollution of some of America's most pristine natural resources. For example, the U.S. Forest Service estimates there are nearly 39,000 (source) abandoned mines with environmental impacts whose impacts include but are not limited to water contamination, water acidity, metal contamination of soil, erosion, discharged drums and tanks, impairment of scenic vistas, and direct loss of habitat (source). Methane emissions and other pollutants accelerating the climate crisis pose gargantuan threats to public land maintenance including NPS-administered units (source). It should be noted that the proponents of H.R. 5283 do not act to address these critical issues affecting the wellbeing of public lands. In this Congress, the bill's supporters have made reckless attempts to: gut bedrock environmental laws that protect our public lands like the National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act; block the Bureau of Land Management Conservation and Landscape Health Rule from implementation; block the Methane Emissions Reduction Program; and force agencies to proceed with the lease of public lands for oil and gas extraction.

Rather than misdirect and mislead the public, we urge Congress to adequately fund federal land management agencies according to need, address the threats of pollution to public land health, prioritize measures to restore ecosystem health, and to pass comprehensive immigration reform. The Senate should prevent the passage of H.R. 5283, and focus on expediting access to work permits for immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S. and providing a path to citizenship for undocumented people and family reunification, including by adopting the Dream Act and creating a path to lawful permanent resident status for long-time recipients of Temporary Protected Status and similar programs.