

September 6, 2024

Mayor John W. Minto, City of Santee

Subject:

The Committee on the Judiciary testimony titled “The Biden-Harris Border Crisis: California Perspectives.”

Good morning, Chairman and Committee members,

The Biden-Harris administration's approach to border security and immigration has significantly and directly impacted California, with San Diego County at the forefront of these challenges. Between September 2023 and May 2024, San Diego County received between 125,000 and 154,000 street releases of migrants. Many were placed on a trolley and released into the East County region.

Based on daily reports sent to the County's Economic Development and Government Affairs (EDGA) office, these unofficial figures underscore the unprecedented and grave scale of the region's border crisis. The influx of migrants has strained local resources, including overcrowding at local hospitals, prompting San Diego County officials to respond with a coordinated effort involving federal, state, and regional support.

In response, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors allocated \$6 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to establish a migrant processing center in San Diego. This center, which operated from October 2023 to February 2024, served as a temporary and stopgap solution to help manage the influx of migrants and mitigate the impact on local communities.

During its operation, the center processed over 80,000 individuals, of whom 99% continued their journey to reunite with sponsors throughout the United States. The services provided at the center were critical in facilitating onward travel. They included translation assistance, geographic information, transportation services, and access to communication tools and Wi-Fi to connect with U.S. sponsors.

The temporary migrant processing center was instrumental in providing much-needed support to individuals released by Customs and Border Protection (CBP). It helped reduce the number of street releases directly into local communities, alleviating some of the immediate pressures on public safety and community resources. However, the center's closure in February 2024 has left San Diego County in dire need of more sustainable, long-term solutions to manage the continued arrival of migrants, underscoring the critical importance of strategic planning and foresight.

To address the ongoing crisis, our region secured a \$19.6 million grant from FEMA to support its response to the migrant influx. This funding is in addition to the \$19 million already granted to Catholic Charities, reflecting the critical need for resources to handle

the situation effectively. The funds are being used to establish a Migrant Transition Day Center operated by Jewish Family Services.

The center will offer essential services to migrants released from the Department of Homeland Security custody. The services provided will include temporary shelter, legal assistance, travel coordination, and other forms of support to facilitate safe and organized transitions for migrants as they continue their journeys in the United States.

The Biden-Harris administration's border policies have led to increased numbers of asylum-seeking migrants entering California, with San Diego County serving as a primary entry point. The local government's proactive measures, supported by federal funding, have been vital in managing the immediate impacts of these policies.

The situation underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive, long-term strategy with improved coordination between federal, state, and local governments and non-profit organizations. I hope this emphasis on urgency demonstrates the gravity of the situation.

In conclusion, San Diego County's response to the border crisis highlights the critical role that local governments play in addressing the challenges associated with increased migration.

The county's efforts to provide essential services and support for migrants demonstrate a strong commitment to humanitarian assistance and public safety.

I want to reassure you that the region is dedicated to moving forward. Our success relies upon continued collaboration and adequate funding to manage the ongoing impacts of the border crisis and ensure San Diego County remains resilient in the face of these challenges.

Thank you.