

Representative Scott Perry (PA-10)
Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee FY21 Member Day Testimony

Chairwoman Roybal-Allard and Ranking Member Fleischmann:

I appreciate the opportunity to present my views and priorities for the FY21 Homeland Security Appropriations Bill. Over the past few Congresses, this particular bill has been the subject of significant partisan controversy – undermining the efforts of the Department to meet its important responsibilities. The Department’s mission is vital to the health, safety, and well-being of every American citizen. It’s incumbent upon us to ensure that DHS has the resources necessary to carry out its missions.

To that end, I urge you to appropriate the amounts requested by the Administration to secure our borders and enforce our immigration laws. Before this Administration, these funds regularly were provided without controversy or conflict – because they’re desperately needed. The situation at our border reached crisis levels in FY19, when a total of 851,508 individuals were apprehended between ports of entry on our Southwest Border – due largely to a lack of physical barriers and a lack of Border Patrol manpower.¹ Until these issues are addressed, our borders will remain unsecure – posing a threat to our national security.

While securing our borders is necessary to secure our Nation, it’s by no means sufficient. Security requires enforcement of our immigration laws in the interior of the United States - far beyond what we currently have. Despite this Administration’s increased enforcement efforts, far too many aliens who have been ordered removed, remain in this Country. The root cause of this issue is inadequate funding for ICE detention beds, which restricts the ability to detain removable aliens. At the end of FY19, there were 595,430 fugitive aliens in the US² - who were ordered removed, but either not placed in custody, or were just released. It’s incomprehensible that over half million aliens ordered removed remain in our Nation. This situation can be addressed only by providing ICE with the resources it needs.

Another issue plaguing our immigration system is the lack of immigration judges to adjudicate the ever-expanding backlog of immigration cases. The non-detained docket stands at 3.2 million cases³, and the average caseload per judge exceeds 2,200. While I understand funding for immigration judges fall under the CJS appropriations bill, we must ensure the simultaneous growth of ICE legal staff.

Finally, I request that the Subcommittee include \$50 million in continued funding for the reimbursement of airports that took early action to install in-line baggage screening systems in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Fourteen airports – including Harrisburg International Airport in my district – installed the systems, with the expectation and promise of timely reimbursement. Almost 20 years since the attacks, these airports still are owed approximately \$87 million. Addressing these outstanding debts will greatly assist these critical security partners.

¹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Fiscal Year 2019 Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) Report, (3).
<https://www.ice.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Document/2019/eroReportFY2019.pdf>

² ICE FY19 ERO Report, (10).

³ ICE FY19 ERO Report, (4).