

Rep. Escobar, T-HUD Testimony

Thank you Chairman Price and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart for this chance to discuss some of the priorities I have before the T-HUD subcommittee.

This year's community project funding process was a great opportunity to engage with El Pasoans who are on the ground and know the needs of our region best. I am proud to have submitted three projects to your subcommittee for consideration.

The first project is the Solar Energy Project at El Paso International Airport. As the country continues to transition to a net-zero economy to combat the climate crisis, we need to be providing economically disadvantaged communities like mine the means to also make that transition. This project would help our region by allowing El Paso International to begin construction of their first on-site solar installation. The installation represents a monumental step in El Paso International's efforts to address climate change and decrease their CO2 footprint.

The second project I would like to highlight is the Paso Del Norte Trail. This trail is meant to run throughout our entire county and will give El Pasoans the opportunity to travel across our area without needing to use a car while also combatting health inequities by providing a space for people to lead an active lifestyle. Additionally, by utilizing green infrastructure design elements the trail will be able to reduce urban flooding exacerbated by climate change. Many portions of the trail still need to be built and this project looks to construct another part of the trail from the entrance of the El Paso Zoo to Tobin.

The third project, the Casitas Community Project, will address homelessness for those who are 18-24 in the El Paso region. While there are many housing options for those experiencing homelessness, this is a population that is typically underserved by homelessness services. Funding the Casitas Community Project would allow the El Paso Center for Children to acquire land and build a 15-unit tiny home community for individuals who are 18-24. This model, which is based off other successful projects in cities like Austin, would give these young adults

access to short or long-term housing while also surrounding them with staff and counselors who can help them navigate adult systems they may otherwise be unprepared to interact with. This will prevent them from falling into chronic homelessness and give them the best chance available to succeed.

Finally, I would like to impress upon the subcommittee the need to ensure that any funding being appropriated, especially funding designated for local governments and entities like community project funds, makes it to the designated recipients. As you may know, for months Texas Governor Greg Abbott has held critical COVID relief funds hostage. This meant entities like schools had been unable to properly spend relief funds on COVID safety measures or were unable to reimburse themselves. While Governor Abbott recently released some of these funds, it is clear strong language needs to be put in place to prevent something like this from happening again. I urge the subcommittee to take this into consideration while you are drafting the final bill.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I look forward to collaborating with the subcommittee as you continue to draft the final appropriations bill.