

October 3, 2017

The Honorable Michael McCaul
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Bennie Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the House Homeland Security Committee:

We, the undersigned organizations, oppose the Border Security for America Act (H.R. 3548) and urge you to vote against any legislation allowing the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to keep building the border wall, rush to hire Border Patrol agents for President Trump's deportation force, deploy surveillance technologies and equipment designed for theaters of war, and make local police forces agents of family separation.

This legislation goes against current trends in migration when apprehensions are low, is out of step with DHS's own assessments of stronger border security than ever, and fails to heed the warnings of peer law enforcement reviews that have found our nation's largest law enforcement agency--U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)-- to lack 21st century best practices that promote fair and bias-free policing, humane conditions of confinement, and accountability for abuses like excessive force.

The past two decades have seen unprecedented levels of spending on border security. A recent report from the [DHS Office of Immigration Statistics](#) concluded that "the southwest land border is more difficult to illegally cross today than ever before." Yet at a time when we should be focused on disaster relief, H.R. 3548 would waste billions of American taxpayer dollars on President Trump's border wall. The wall - and the bill as a whole which harms public lands protections - would seize property from border landowners, irreparably damage fragile ecosystems, harm international economic opportunities, cause life-threatening flooding in border communities, and infringe on tribal sovereignty.

Measures in this bill senselessly militarize communities that over 15 million call home, including 20% of all DACA recipients. These communities, which include cities such as San Diego and El Paso, are among the safest in the country and would be harmed, not helped, by this bill. H.R. 3548 doesn't take into account the true needs and views of border residents, such as Dreamers who are opposed to entangling their futures with a border-security crackdown that threatens their families.

H.R. 3548 would ramp up President Trump's deportation force by adding 5,000 additional Border Patrol agents to its ranks. The Border Patrol has instilled fear, not trust, in border communities by harassing and [deporting DACA recipients](#); [apprehending parents waiting in a hospital for their infant's emergency surgery](#); and [arresting a domestic violence survivor at a courthouse](#) seeking a protective order against her abuser (notably, the incident was falsified under oath by a Border Patrol agent).

This dramatic increase of heavily armed border agents is unnecessary and represents a 25 percent increase in the Patrol at a time when border apprehensions are on a 17-year downward trend. In fiscal year 2016, Border Patrol agents nationwide averaged less than two apprehensions per month, a figure that has only decreased in 2017.

Because of a resistance to cultural change, which includes the lowest percentage of female agents in all of federal law enforcement, Border Patrol has been unable even to hire close to the number of agents

already authorized. Adding more is completely unjustified; indeed, a recent report from the DHS [Office of Inspector General](#) concluded that DHS has failed to explain or justify President Trump's request for additional agents.

CBP is facing staggering integrity and professionalism challenges with its current personnel, problems which should be addressed instead of H.R. 3548. Overdue reforms such as body-worn cameras, a properly functioning complaints system, and diversity initiatives to improve the hiring of women and other underrepresented groups should be prioritized.

Yet H.R. 3548 would also eliminate critical polygraph requirements, widely used by federal law enforcement, for certain CBP applicants. This polygraph waiver threatens to repeat recent disastrous history when officers/agents hired during the late 2000s CBP surge engaged in corruption at a rate far exceeding other law enforcement agencies—some working for international drug trafficking organizations—and were frequently abusive with impunity, including in notorious cases of excessive force and sexual assault. Watering down CBP hiring standards is dangerous and risks again employing CBP officers and agents who would jeopardize national security and public safety as well as degrade the quality of life for border residents.

More than four years have passed since your Committee passed bipartisan border-security legislation based on Chairman McCaul's then-refusal to commit massive resources without first establishing clear metrics and oversight. Where is that fiscal responsibility and prudent policymaking today, and how does a "big, beautiful wall" exemplify such good governance? Our nation urgently needs Congress to reform immigration laws, yet leadership has chosen instead to more than double down on failed militarization in some of our safest and most diverse communities.

Left unchecked, border agents' far-reaching enforcement powers have already resulted in lawlessness: widespread racial profiling, humiliating and privacy-invading searches of border residents and visitors, a humanitarian crisis of migrant deaths, and the separation of families who have called border communities their home for generations.

The American public opposes wasteful, punitive immigration and border enforcement measures like H.R. 3548. The House should immediately bring to the floor a clean Dream Act and stop pandering to the nativist Trump deportation force and the President's wall obsession.

Sincerely,

African American Ministers In Action
Americans for Immigrant Justice
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - AAJC
Border Network for Human Rights
Catholic Charities of Southern New Mexico
Center for American Progress
Center for Biological Diversity
Church World Service
Coalición de Derechos Humanos
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Conference of Major Superiors of Men
Defenders of Wildlife
Detained Migrant Solidarity Committee-El Paso

Detention Watch Network
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Equality New Mexico
Farmworker Justice
Franciscan Action Network
Fuerza Del Valle
GreenLatinos
Hispanic Federation
Hope Border Institute
Human Rights First
Indivisible
Interfaith Worker Justice
Kino Border Initiative
La Union Del Pueblo Entero
Latin America Working Group (LAWG)
Leadership Conference of Women Religious
LULAC
MABAH
Mi Familia Vota
Michigan United
Migrant Rights Collective
Muslim Public Affairs Council
National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF)
National Council of Asian Pacific Americans (NCAPA)
National Employment Law Project
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Law Center
National Justice for Our Neighbors
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice
New Mexico Environmental Law Center
New York Immigration Coalition
NM Comunidades en Acción y de Fe (CAFe)
Northern Jaguar Project
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
OneAmerica
Population Connection Action Fund
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES)
Rio Grande Chapter Sierra Club
Save EPA
Sierra Club
Sisters of Mercy /Laredo, Texas

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas - Institute Justice Team
Sojourners
Southern Border Communities Coalition
Southwest Environmental Center
The Green Valley/Sahuarita Samaritans
United We Dream
University Leadership Initiative
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
We Belong Together