

Honorable Members of the Committee on the Budget

Hearing on *The Cost of the Border Crisis*

May 7th, 2024

Distinguished members of the Committee, I write to you on behalf of myself, a resident of Tarrant County, TX, and as President of Alliance for a Safe Texas.

Since the onset of the current administration, Texas has continued to be at the forefront of the open assault against the sovereignty of our state and the nation resulting from the continuous border crisis. However, in the face of these challenges, the State Legislature and Governor Greg Abbott have not faltered. They have been proactive, taking unprecedented actions to mitigate the damages inflicted on our state and citizens as a direct consequence of the unmitigated failures under the current administration.

Despite the immense challenges posed by the border crisis, Texans have shown remarkable resilience. From the border security efforts of Operation Lone Star (OLS), the expansion of OLS task forces across the state, to reimbursing property owners for the damages resulting from smuggling efforts by cartel operatives and doing the work federal agencies should be doing, the negative impacts thrust upon the shoulders of Texans are nearly impossible to quantify. Put into context, Texas has spent **\$11.6 billion** of our citizens tax dollars in just over four years, a cost more than most state budgets and more than allotments for border security under the Trump administration.¹

Below is a mere snapshot of the various ways and perspectives in which Texas and the U.S. continue to be negatively impacted by the ongoing border crisis.

Increase in Trafficking

Texas is one of the leading states in the U.S. for human trafficking cases. In January 2024 alone, the Texas Department of Public Safety (TXDPS) and partners conducted 12 operations resulting in the rescue of over 50 victims, including 9 minors.² Yet, despite this well-known fact, the current administration continues to disregard the safety and wellbeing of Texans by facilitating and allowing the most unprecedented border security and immigration disaster in our country's history. Houston, Dallas/Fort Worth, and San Antonio lead the state in documented human trafficking cases.³

Simultaneously, these areas are amongst the highest where the most vulnerable population in this border debacle, unaccompanied minors (or unaccompanied alien children (UAC)), are released to poorly vetted sponsors, causing concerns about the increased probability of trafficking.⁴ Under the Biden Administration, 59,437 UACs have been released to sponsors residing in Texas according to ORR.⁵ The releases of unaccompanied minors in Texas far outnumber those seen in any other state. An astonishing 65% of the UACs released into Texas since Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 has occurred under the Biden administration.⁶

¹ Bethany Blankley. The Center Square. "Operation Lone Star border security funding totals more than multiple state budgets." Apr. 10, 2024. https://www.thecentersquare.com/texas/article_9ea49cee-c76f-11ee-b9ed-5b9573aa2815.html

² Texas Department of Public Safety. Last accessed May 5, 2024. <https://www.dps.texas.gov/news/dps-announces-results-human-trafficking-operations>

³ Natalie Haddard. WFAA. "Dallas, Houston and San Antonio lead in human trafficking cases in Texas." July 17, 2023. <https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/texas-cities-lead-human-trafficking-cases/287-417f66c4-0784-4a65-bd7c-ad0f7e22aa8d>

⁴ Bethany Blankley. The Center Square. "Report: Federal agencies not safeguarding unaccompanied minors: Texas group calls on state Legislature to investigate." Apr. 16, 2024. https://www.thecentersquare.com/texas/article_56flaffe-fc12-11ee-93c2-a3d5bc90e229.html

⁵ The Department of Health and Human Services. Last accessed May 4, 2024. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-state>

⁶ Ibid.

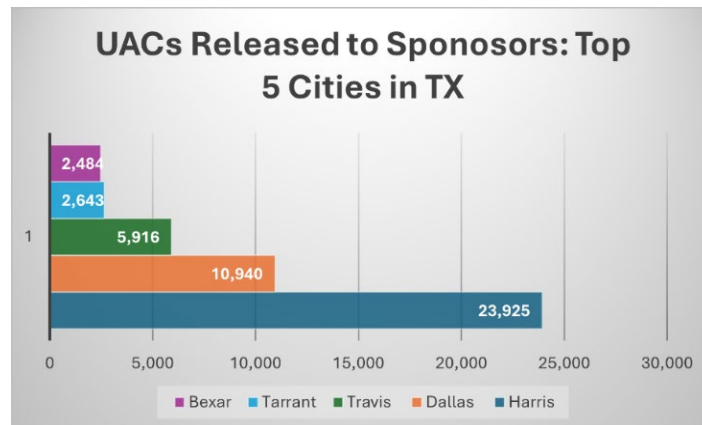


Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas

Source: HHS

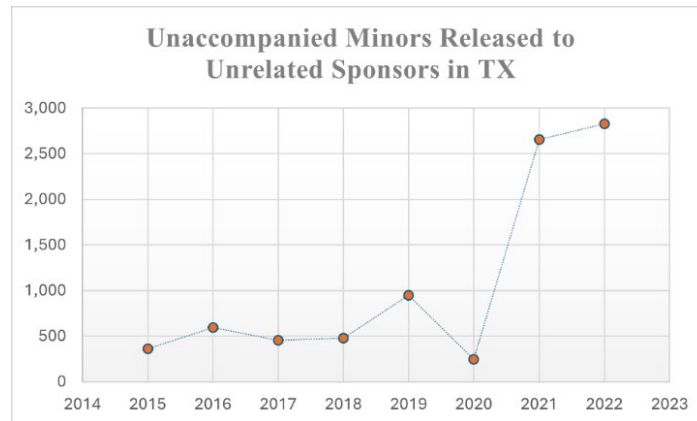


Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas

Source: New York Times, HHS

In Tarrant, 2,643 unaccompanied minors from 25 different countries were released to sponsors residing in the county since FY 2021.⁷ Simultaneously, using the data obtained by the New York Times⁸ from HHS, Alliance for a Safe Texas has identified the number of UACs in Tarrant County who were released to sponsors other than the minors' parents. Comparing the data to previous fiscal years, the number of UACs released to sponsors who were not the child's parent has risen alarmingly high under the current administration.

As documented cases of child trafficking have increased nationwide, the current administration has allowed the release of tens of thousands of unaccompanied minors to inadequately vetted sponsors, most of whom are not their parents, in the metroplex areas of the state, which are experiencing the highest levels of known trafficking cases.

⁷ Hannah Drier. *HHS-child-migrant-data*. New York Times. Last accessed May 5, 2024. <https://github.com/nytimes/hhs-child-migrant-data>

⁸ Ibid.

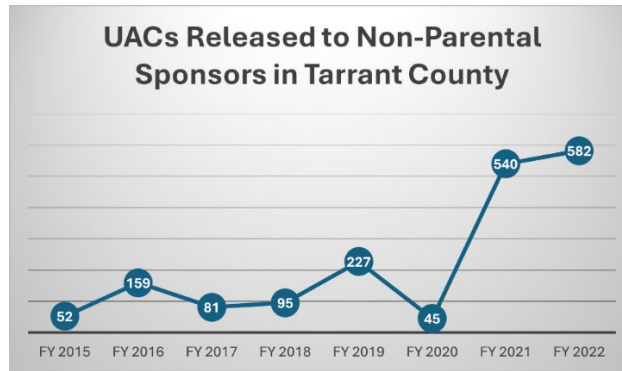


Chart: Alliance for a Safe Texas

Source: New York Times, HHS Data

The soul-crushing and dehumanizing cost of trafficking has negative impacts on the victims, families, and communities that could never be quantified. Yet this Administration has only codified dangerous relaxed policies⁹ that I believe only incentivize and expand the exploitation of vulnerable migrant children with the use of American taxpayer dollars. Sadly, Texas is the epicenter, placing further financial strain on law enforcement and non-profit anti-trafficking groups.

If the intentional neglect by any American parent resulted in the harming of their child or the child they are charged to care for; the federal and state governments are obligated to intervene for the best interest and wellbeing of the child. Many American children are forced out of their homes, and parental rights are stripped away from citizens as child protective agencies with little credible evidence proving abuse or neglect often intervene to the detriment of the children, parents, and communities.

Yet, despite years of overwhelming documented evidence of abuses and trafficking directly resulting from the relaxed policies set forth by DHS, HHS, and ORR, these agencies are continuously rewarded by Congress with billions in additional funding, contracts, and raises, such as that recently signed off by congressional members for the director of ORR¹⁰.

Furthermore, despite years of allegations of abuse, neglect, and disregard of federal immigration laws, many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to receive unprecedented amounts in no-bid contracts, grants, and awards funded by taxpayer dollars with no oversight, transparency, or culpability to Congress or the American people.¹¹

Instead of further funding the abuse and trafficking of children from other countries, Congress should hold HHS, DHS, ORR, and contracting organizations accountable by ceasing funding until agency heads and organization leaders are thoroughly investigated for their role in facilitating the handing over of children to the doorsteps of their abusers. Additionally, Congress needs to make necessary changes to federal laws to force transparency of the agencies and contracted affiliates and ensure accountability measures are passed to implement now and in the future.

⁹ National Archives Federal Register: A rule by the Children and Families Administration. April 30, 2024. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/30/2024-08329/unaccompanied-children-program-foundational-rule#:~:text=The%20TVPR%20states%20further%20that,child%20is%20an%20unaccompanied%20child>

¹⁰ Blankley, B. The Center Square. "45 Republicans vote against defunding ORR head salary over missing children, abuse allegations." Nov. 16, 2023. https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_77afeda8-84cd-11ee-9b3b-cfbfe9db98ec.html

¹¹ Sheena Rodriguez. Alliance for a Safe Texas. *The need for state regulation and oversight of facilities housing minors in Texas*. Nov. 2023. <https://securetheborder.us/research-publications>

Impact on Schools in Texas & the U.S.

As an unaccompanied minor, by definition, each of these children is allegedly of school age. The average cost for a single public-school student in Texas, according to an analysis by Austin American-Statesman for the 2023-2024 school year, was \$10,387.¹² The estimated cost of a single year of education for the over 59,000 UACs released across Texas since fiscal 2021 using the information from the analysis is estimated to be over **\$617 million**. This is in addition to and does not include the number of illegal migrant families that have settled into the state and whose children are entered into the school system.

Moreover, the financial burden to U.S. taxpayers was recently outlined in a report detailing the estimated calculations of just the 2021-2022 school year, costing roughly **\$59 billion**, in addition to the not classified estimated expense of LEP students costing an additional **\$16.9 billion**.¹³

Impact on Healthcare Systems in Texas & the U.S.

Since 2021, Texas healthcare systems have been overwhelmed by the influx of illegal migrants, straining hospitals, particularly in rural areas already struggling to keep their doors open. The costs of treatment are often not paid by the illegal alien population; therefore, the financial responsibility is pushed onto the shoulders of the taxpayers. The Florida State Legislature recently added a provision to documentation on taxpayer-funded medical programs indicating if a patient is an American citizen or illegally present. **Congress should consider implementing similar provisions to taxpayer-funded federal health care programs to quantify the financial costs to taxpayers better.**

The first report which released the documented responses estimated the burden on taxpayers as \$68 million during the first three months of the bill's implementation, with **\$275 million** projected for the year¹⁴ in addition to the **\$340 million** spent in 2021.¹⁵ Additionally, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services identified the costs of healthcare for migrants to U.S. taxpayers as **\$7 billion** in fiscal 2021 and **\$5.4 billion** in fiscal 2022, "with migrants receiving at least **\$8 billion** in improper Medicaid payouts (10% of the nation's total of **\$80 billion**)," according to the Center Square.¹⁶

However, it is not just the financial costs Americans must endure regarding health care but also the impacts on accessibility to the services and care our tax dollars pay for. For example, in rural communities along the border, EMS services are frequently consumed with treating illegal migrant injuries caused by abuses endured along the route to the U.S., smuggling attempts, and bailouts, leaving local citizens without access to lifesaving services their tax dollars fund.¹⁷

Further Strain on Texas Communities

Under the current administration, large and small NGO facilities housing unaccompanied minors in rural areas of Texas raised concerns for local officials regarding the potential negative impacts on the already

¹² Keri Heath & Bayliss Wagner. Austin American-Statesman. "Analysis: Texas schools facing lowest inflation-adjusted state, local funding since 2020." Feb. 5, 2024. <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/education/2024/02/05/education-texas-public-school-funding-lowest-inflation-adjusted-state-local-since-2020/72154083007/>

¹³ Steve Wilson. The Center Square. "Report: Border crisis could cost U.S. taxpayers \$451 billion." Nov. 13, 2023. https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_26583728-826e-11ee-ac63-ebl1a26b4f9db.html

¹⁴ State of Florida Twenty-First Statewide Grand Jury: 6th Presentation. Mar. 6, 2024. <https://www.flgov.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/6th-Presentation-of-the-Twenty-First-Statewide-Grand-Jury.pdf>

¹⁵ Blankley, B. The Center Square. "Hospital costs for foreign national illegally in Florida total \$340M in fiscal '21." Feb. 24, 2023. https://www.thecentersquare.com/florida/article_fbabd6e2-b478-11ed-94fe-d7d488134de8.html

¹⁶ Wilson, S. The Center Square. "Report: Border crisis could cost U.S. taxpayers \$451 billion." Nov. 13, 2023. https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_26583728-826e-11ee-ac63-ebl1a26b4f9db.html

¹⁷ Blankley, B. The Center Square. "Texas sheriff: County 'under siege' with escalating border crisis." Mar. 16, 2023. https://www.thecentersquare.com/texas/article_353cc59e-c3f4-11ed-8618-0384acb9b925.html

strained local healthcare services from El Paso¹⁸ to Pecos¹⁹ and beyond. Additionally, city officials in Pecos cited significant losses of staff to critical staff members and cited lost revenue of over \$300,000 in HOT funds as a direct result of the ORR facility.²⁰

Furthermore, during the pandemic, sick illegal border crossers were sent by federal agencies into Texas metroplex hospitals for treatments, causing reported infection rates in those respective areas to soar.²¹ The inflated data included the vast number of transported ill migrants and was counted as a significant factor in determining lockdown responses, which prompted reactionary policies and ordinances hindering the lives of millions of Texans, their businesses, schools, and daily lives: a consequence which can never be truly quantified.²²

Impacts on Tarrant County

Last month, my county Sheriff, Bill Waybourn, testified to a House Oversight and Accountability subcommittee regarding the impact on public safety of the ongoing border crisis in Tarrant County. Located in North Texas, Tarrant is the third largest populated county in the state, with more than 2.2 million residents. It is also the county I call home. According to the Sheriff, numerous criminal illegal aliens currently being held in the county jail cost taxpayers roughly \$24,000 per day, with the average stay reported as 145 days.²³

The list of 178 alleged crimes committed by the 264 jail mates provided by Waybourn's testimony included: 8 charges of murder, 44 cases of aggravated sexual assault of a child, and 3 charges of kidnapping with a deadly weapon.²⁴

Cartel operatives and affiliated gang activities continue to plague the county, including stash houses and human and drug trafficking. According to the Sheriff, in a recent stash house bust, cages were found in the home where women were kept until their debt was paid. Tarrant County averages 15 fentanyl overdoses per day and a death occurring every 36 hours.²⁵ County jail mental health officials are attributing the "strong availability of drugs" as the culprit for skyrocketing mental health cases found in county inmates.²⁶

Also incurred to Tarrant County taxpayers is the cost of UACs released into our communities and presumably entering our local school districts. As previously mentioned, according to HHS, my county has absorbed 2,643 unaccompanied minors since FY 2021. The cost to local and state taxpayers' using the previously mentioned analysis amounts to \$10,387 per student per year; the estimated cost of a single

¹⁸ Amna Nawaz & Phil Maravilla. PBS. "Inside the El Paso medical clinics struggling to care for influx of migrants." May 29, 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/inside-the-el-paso-medical-clinics-struggling-to-care-for-influx-of-migrants>

¹⁹ Rachel Ripp. NewsWest 9. "Pecos residents say migrants coming could put a strain on local resources." Mar. 22, 2021. <https://www.newswest9.com/article/news/local/pecos-residents-say-migrants-coming-could-put-a-strain-on-local-resources/513-54fe1633-16e2-437a-98c7-9e8604cd79d1>

²⁰ Rodriguez, S. Alliance for a Safe Texas. *The need for state regulation and oversight of facilities housing minors in Texas*. Nov. 2023. <https://securetheborder.us/research-publications>

²¹ Emily Crane. New York Post. "Illegal immigrants being sent to major Texas cities without COVID tests." Aug. 12, 2021. <https://nypost.com/2021/08/12/migrants-being-sent-to-major-texas-cities-without-covid-tests/>

²² Rodriguez, S. Alliance for a Safe Texas. *The need for state regulation and oversight of facilities housing minors in Texas*. Nov. 2023. <https://securetheborder.us/research-publications>

²³ U.S. House of Representatives. Committee on Oversight and Accountability: National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs subcommittee. Testimony by Sheriff Bill Waybourn. *How the Border Crisis Impacts Public Safety*. Apr. 16, 2024. <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/how-the-border-crisis-impacts-public-safety/>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

year of education for the UACs released under the Biden Administration in my county is over \$27 million.

Congressional Members must Respond

Despite the ingrown resiliency of the Lone Star state, Texas' resources are spread thin. Our state foster care, hospital and healthcare systems are overwhelmed. Shortages of manpower across Texas law enforcement agencies continue as labor and human trafficking cases spike. Meanwhile, the current administration continues to fail to uphold its constitutional duties to protect the sovereign state of Texas and the nation with its harmful border security and immigration policies. When the federal government intentionally fails to uphold its responsibilities to the American people, the Constitution, and the laws it has sworn to defend and protect, the states are forced to do all they can to fill those deficiencies.

How long must Texas and American citizens be forced to shoulder the burden of responsibility and costs designated to the federal government? How much more death and financial burden is acceptable before Congress decides to address the true "root causes" of this border crisis, which are the federal policies implemented under the Biden administration. **Congress must respond with appropriate actions and shut down the border by cutting funding to the very agencies allowing for the border crisis to continue.**

While Veterans are denied health care, American public schools and child protective services continue to fail American children and families, law enforcement agencies across the country lack funding and manpower, critical infrastructure is crumbling, and homelessness, especially among our veteran population, continues to spike; surely Congress could find better ways to spend nearly half a trillion of taxpayer funds that would actually benefit Americans rather than allow the continuation of unrestrained illegal immigration jeopardizing the security of our nation. **Congress should support and pass with haste legislation proposed by Congressman Roger Williams, which would reimburse Texas for the expenses of OLS and allow us to continue to do what the current administration refuses to do to the best of our ability: secure the border.**²⁷

I am thankful for the Texas state legislature, Governor Greg Abbott, and Texas law enforcement agencies' continued efforts to deter and decrease the negative impacts on our communities. While the financial burden resulting from the current administration's intentional dereliction of duty is far too great, I fear that the actual cost of human lives lost, women and children exploited, and the overwhelming financial burden on taxpayers, law enforcement agencies, schools, and other social networks will be felt for years to come and remain remarkably unquantifiable.

Thank you, Honorable members of the committee, for your time and consideration in addressing these pressing issues.

Sincerely,

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²⁷ Blankley, B. The Center Square. "Bill would require feds to reimburse Texas for border security costs." Feb. 21, 2024. https://www.thecentersquare.com/texas/article_58b3fd86-d0bd-11ee-9536-cb8a40e6ee29.html