

Secretary

U.S. Department of Homeland  
Security  
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland  
Security**

April 26, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: Interested Parties

FROM: Alejandro N. Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security

SUBJECT: **DHS Plan for Southwest Border Security and Preparedness**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the Biden-Harris Administration, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been executing a comprehensive and deliberate strategy to secure our borders and build a safe, orderly, and humane immigration system. After inheriting a broken and dismantled immigration system, since January 2021 DHS has effectively managed an unprecedented number of noncitizens seeking to enter the United States and interdicted more drugs and disrupted more smuggling operations than ever before.

The legal authority for enforcing our border security and immigration laws comes from Title 8 of the U.S Code. Among other things, Title 8 provides that individuals who cross the border without legal authorization are processed for removal and, if unable to establish a legal basis to remain in the United States, promptly removed from the country.

In March 2020, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) invoked a section of Title 42 of the U.S. Code, a law addressing public health, not immigration, to require the immediate expulsion of noncitizen single adults and families in order to protect Americans from the spread of COVID-19. As a result, a significant percentage of all noncitizens encountered at the Southwest Border are currently expelled pursuant to the Title 42 public health Order. Beginning in September 2021, DHS began planning in anticipation of the eventual lifting of Title 42. On April 1, 2022, CDC announced that it was lifting the Order effective May 23. All noncitizens will then be processed pursuant to Title 8 once again.

When the Title 42 public health Order is lifted, we anticipate migration levels will increase, as smugglers will seek to take advantage of and profit from vulnerable migrants. The increase in migration being experienced by the United States is consistent with larger global trends: there are currently more people in the world displaced from their homes than at any time since World War II, including in the Western Hemisphere.

This memorandum provides more details on how DHS is leading the execution of a whole-of-government plan to prepare for and manage increased encounters of noncitizens at our Southwest Border. Many elements of this plan are already being implemented as we manage a historic number of encounters, including a record number of noncitizens trying to enter the United States multiple times. Others are elements that we are prepared to implement once the Title 42 termination goes into effect. The six pillars of our plan are as follows:

**Border Security Pillar 1: We are surging resources, including personnel, transportation, medical support, and facilities to support border operations.**

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) currently has 23,000 Agents and Officers working along the Southwest Border, which includes a recent increase of 600 personnel and support of law enforcement officers and agents from other government agencies. Additionally, approximately 500 Agents have been returned to the vital border security mission as a result of increased civilian processing personnel to perform those functions, as well as processing efficiency. By May 23, we will be prepared to hold approximately 18,000 noncitizens in CBP custody at any given time, up from 13,000 at the beginning of 2021, and we have doubled our ability to transport noncitizens on a daily basis, with flexibility to increase further. In order to safeguard public health and the safety of our workforce, noncitizens, and border communities, our efforts also include medical support and COVID-19 mitigation protocols, including testing and administering age-appropriate COVID-19 vaccines in 24 CBP sites by May 23, building on our existing vaccination program for those in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody.

**Border Security Pillar 2: We are increasing CBP processing efficiency and moving with deliberate speed to mitigate potential overcrowding at Border Patrol stations and to alleviate the burden on the surrounding border communities.**

This includes launching three new initiatives, which will support these decompression efforts, while ensuring the continued integrity of our security screening processes: Enhanced Central Processing Centers; en route processing; and streamlined processing. CBP is also working to increase processing efficiency at Ports of Entry (POEs) to further facilitate safe and orderly inspection of noncitizens.

**Border Security Pillar 3: We are administering consequences for unlawful entry, including removal, detention, and prosecution.**

Core to this plan is our commitment to continue to strictly enforce our immigration laws. This includes increased use of Expedited Removal, detaining single adults when appropriate, referring for prosecution those whose conduct warrants it, and accelerating asylum adjudications that enable us to more quickly process and remove from the United States those who do not qualify for relief under our laws.

**Border Security Pillar 4: We are bolstering the capacity of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to receive noncitizens after they have been processed by CBP and are awaiting the results of their immigration removal proceedings. And, we are ensuring appropriate**



**coordination with and support for state, local, and community leaders to help mitigate increased impacts to their communities.**

Our goal is to help communities alleviate the pressures they experience by expanding NGO capacity, through communication and coordination with all relevant partners, and other assistance such as the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant program that supplements and expands ongoing work of local NGOs to meet the needs of local agencies.

**Border Security Pillar 5: We are targeting and disrupting the transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and smugglers who take advantage of and profit from vulnerable migrants, and who seek to traffic drugs into our country.**

In April 2022, DHS and other federal agencies intensified our disruption efforts, marshalling the largest surge of resources and disruptive activities against human smuggling networks in recent memory. The immediate result has been over 2,500 arrests, investigations, and disruptions of smuggling infrastructure, such as buses and safe houses. The federal government has also established a new intelligence unit to coordinate and strengthen the capability for early warning of migrant movements.

**Border Security Pillar 6: We are deterring irregular migration south of our border, in partnership with the Department of State (DOS), other federal agencies, and nations throughout the Western Hemisphere, to ensure that we are sharing the responsibility throughout the region.**

In the past two months, we have signed new migration agreements with Costa Rica and Panama and continue close cooperation with Mexico. We are also sending a clear message in the region to counteract misinformation from smugglers, including that the termination of the Title 42 public health Order does not mean that the U.S. border is open. As we execute this work, our objective continues to be the safe, orderly, and humane processing of noncitizens, consistent with our laws, while protecting national security and public safety. Across all of our work in this space, we are ensuring we can uphold our laws and our values in treating noncitizens in a humane way, as we did last year when we rapidly addressed the acute needs of unaccompanied children at the Southwest Border.

**Conclusion**

Our outdated immigration system was not built to manage the current levels and types of migratory flows that we are experiencing and is already under strain. This is true at the federal level, as well as for state, local, and NGO partners. However, we have been able to manage increased encounters because of prudent planning and execution, and the talent and unwavering dedication of the DHS workforce and our state, local, and community partners.

Despite these efforts, a significant increase in migrant encounters will substantially strain our system even further. We will address this challenge successfully, but it will take time, and we need the partnership of Congress, state and local officials, NGOs, and communities to do so. We are operating within a fundamentally broken immigration system that only Congress can fix.

## BACKGROUND

**After inheriting a broken and dismantled immigration system, the Biden-Harris Administration is securing the border and building a fair, orderly, and humane immigration system, with demonstrable results since January 2021.**

The Biden-Harris Administration inherited a broken and dismantled immigration system. On January 20, 2021, the President sent the *U.S. Citizenship Act of 2021* to Congress with a call for urgent action. At DHS, we are working every day, despite that broken system, to secure our borders and build a more just immigration system.

### Securing the Border

DHS works tirelessly to secure the Southwest Border through a combination of highly trained personnel, sophisticated ground and aerial monitoring systems, and robust intelligence and information sharing networks. Through this layered border security network, we have a better understanding of who is attempting to enter the country than ever before and can focus our enforcement efforts more effectively to address potential threats.

The greatest asset in our border security network is the DHS workforce. There are currently over 23,000 CBP Agents and Officers working along the Southwest Border. Over the past year, DHS has supplemented permanent staff by overseeing the deployment of more than 10,000 additional federal personnel to the Southwest Border in multiple rotations. This includes CBP Agents and Officers; other agency law enforcement personnel; personnel from the Department of Defense (DOD), which has supporting CBP operations since 2006, and the DHS Volunteer Force. Personnel have been added to increase patrols along the Southwest Border to prevent the entry of people and goods between POEs, enhance processing efficiency, and increase humanitarian capacity. DHS also has worked to train thousands of additional agents and officers and execute contracts for processing assistance to further augment border security efforts.

DHS has been investing in technology and installing new systems to enhance border security and the effectiveness of our operations, including advanced automated surveillance towers, ground movement detection systems, and new aerial platforms. These efforts have delivered concrete results, as further described below.

With support from Congress, DHS has been applying appropriated financial resources to support our efforts. In the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 budget, DHS secured additional resources: \$100 million to strengthen Border Patrol Agent hiring programs and contract for processors to work in Border Patrol stations; more than \$250 million in funding for border security technology; over \$85 million for non-intrusive inspection technology to scan vehicles and goods entering the country; and more than \$70 million for additional aircraft and sensors. In addition, Congress allocated \$1.4 billion to support contingency operations on the Southwest Border.

### Building a More Just Immigration System

Along with our efforts to secure the border, over the past 15 months, we implemented critical reforms that ended cruel and unjust policies of the prior Administration. We have issued new guidelines regarding immigration enforcement priorities that focus the Department's resources



on the apprehension and removal of noncitizens who pose a threat to our national security, border security, or public safety. These guidelines mark a new approach to enforcement as they focus resources on those who pose the greatest threat. The most recent guidelines also enable the Department's experienced personnel to use their discretion and focus DHS enforcement resources in a more targeted way, while protecting civil rights and civil liberties.

The results speak for themselves. ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) arrested an average of 1,034 aggravated felons per month from February through September 2021, a 53 percent increase over the monthly average during 2016 and a 51 percent increase over the period 2017-2020. During the same period in 2021, ICE removed an average of 937 aggravated felons per month, the highest level ever recorded and the greatest public safety impact since ICE began collecting detailed criminality data. From February-September 2021, 46 percent of ICE removals were of serious criminals overall (persons convicted of felonies or aggravated felonies), compared to 17 percent during 2016 and 18 percent during 2017-2020.

The Department is committed to protecting vulnerable populations and has taken several significant steps to advance our efforts on this front. A few examples:

- We have implemented actions to promote a fair labor market by focusing our enforcement on unscrupulous employers, thereby supporting more effective enforcement of wage protections, workplace safety, labor rights, and other employment laws and standards.
- We have issued a new, comprehensive policy that provides an expanded and non-exhaustive list of Protected Areas – such as courthouses, places of worship, and disaster or emergency relief sites – to ensure that enforcement actions, to the fullest extent possible, are not taken at or near a location that would restrain people's access to essential services or engagement in essential activities.
- We have made significant strides in improving the conditions of care in detention facilities including implementing trauma-informed care in CBP facilities, hiring additional child welfare and medical providers to work in CBP facilities, implementing new policies establishing standards of care for vulnerable individuals, and closing facilities that repeatedly have failed to maintain safe conditions.
- In partnership with DOS, we reimplemented and expanded the Central American Minors program to increase the pool of qualified candidates who can access this safe, orderly pathway. For example, the expansion now allows legal guardians in the United States with a pending asylum application or U visa petition to sponsor their children for resettlement consideration.
- In partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), we ensured the safe and humane treatment of unaccompanied children in our custody by quickly reducing the average time to transfer a child into HHS care and the number of unaccompanied children in Border Patrol facilities.
- And critically, we have reunited more than 200 families who were cruelly and unjustly separated at the U.S.-Mexico border by the prior Administration and are working to reunite many more.

## STATE OF MIGRATION

**The United States is experiencing an increase in migration, consistent with larger global trends. There are currently more people in the world displaced from their homes than at any time since World War II, including in the Western Hemisphere.**

Over the past few years, irregular migration along the Southwest Border has increased to unprecedented levels and presents new challenges that affect our processing and complicate removals. In the past three weeks, CBP has encountered an average of over 7,800 migrants per day across the Southwest Border. This is compared to a historical average of 1,600 per day in the pre-pandemic years (2014-2019). In addition to this exponential increase, DHS has seen a pronounced shift in the demographics and nationalities of noncitizens encountered at and between land ports of entry – with more single adults claiming fear, varying levels of family units, and a steady flow of unaccompanied children, who have unique vulnerabilities and needs. Migrants from Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua have steadily increased, accounting for 37 percent of FY 2022 non-Mexican encounters to-date, up from 8 percent between 2014-2019. And due to the sharp increase in encounters of Ukrainians at the Southwest Border in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, we have established a new program for processing Ukrainians in Europe that will substantially reduce incentives to seek admission via Mexico.

The United States is not alone in experiencing an increase in migration. There are currently more people displaced from their homes across the world than at any time since World War II. In our hemisphere, violence, food insecurity, severe poverty, corruption, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and dire economic conditions all contribute to the increase. More than 6 million Venezuelan refugees and migrants have fled their homes, making this the second-largest external displacement crisis in the world. Seventeen countries in Latin America and the Caribbean generously host approximately 80 percent of this Venezuelan diaspora, including an estimated 1.8 million in Colombia, 1.3 million in Peru, and large numbers in Ecuador, Chile, Brazil and elsewhere. Costa Rica, a country of only 5 million people, is hosting approximately 150,000 Nicaraguan migrants.

Noncitizens making their way to the Southwest Border travel via air, land, and sea into Mexico and up to Mexico's northern states. These movements into and through Mexico are often facilitated by numerous human smuggling organizations that exploit them for profit, and involve crossing inhospitable jungles, rugged mountains, and raging rivers, often with small children in tow. Upon reaching the border area, noncitizens seeking to enter the United States without going through the POEs pay cartels to guide them along the final miles of their journey. This cartel-controlled movement of people across the border is a billion-dollar criminal enterprise. The cartels willfully place noncitizens in danger during their journey. Tragically, a significant number of individuals perish along the way. The depth of suffering these migrants are willing to endure speaks to the desperation they feel about their prospects in their home countries.

**When the Title 42 public health Order is lifted, we anticipate migration levels will increase further, as smugglers will seek to take advantage of and profit from vulnerable migrants. We will continue to remove individuals without legal claims under Title 8, consistent with our laws.**

Following the lifting of CDC's Title 42 public health Order, we expect increased border flows, in light of exploitation by smugglers, continued demand for access to the United States from people fleeing violence and economic turmoil in their home countries, and other factors discussed above. In preparation for this, DHS operational agencies and partners have planned for multiple scenarios to ensure preparedness and the safe, orderly, and humane processing of individuals, consistent with our laws.

### Migration Authorities

As noted above, we have been managing historic levels of migration: 1.72 million encounters by CBP in FY 2021. DHS completed 1.2 million repatriations in FY 2021, via a combination of immigration enforcement removals pursuant to Title 8 and public health expulsions pursuant to Title 42. This was the highest number of repatriations since 2006.

Since March 2020, CDC's Title 42 public health Order has required the immediate expulsion of noncitizen single adults and families at the Southwest Border to mitigate risk to the American public due to COVID-19. As a result, a significant percentage of all noncitizens encountered at the Southwest Border are currently expelled pursuant to Title 42. The large number of expulsions during the pandemic has contributed to a higher-than-usual number of noncitizens making repeated border crossing attempts: more than one in three encounters at the Southwest Border are repeat entrants, including almost half of single adult encounters. Thus, while total enforcement encounters increased 82 percent between 2019 (the last pre-pandemic year) and 2021, the number of unique individuals encountered at the border increased by 30 percent.

In light of CDC's decision to terminate Title 42, beginning on May 23, 2022, families and single adults who cross the border without legal authorization will be placed into Title 8 removal proceedings. Under Title 8 authorities, noncitizens without a viable asylum claim or unable to establish a legal basis to remain in the United States are removed to their home countries. Economic need and flight from generalized violence are not a basis for asylum in the United States. Only those with a well-founded fear of persecution based on protected grounds are eligible for asylum. Expedited Removal is a tool to quickly remove individuals who do not express a fear of return to their home country, following an assessment of asylum claims. In addition, Mexican migrants can be quickly removed under Voluntary Removal, a process that in practice takes about the same amount of time as an expulsion pursuant to Title 42. There are consequences to entering without authorization. Recent arrivals ordered for removal or subject to Expedited Removal are generally subject to a five-year bar on admission to the United States, and reentry within this five-year period after removal is subject to felony prosecution.

Of note, our border security efforts also address irregular maritime migration, which is always dangerous and often deadly. The termination of Title 42 will not impact the U.S. Coast Guard's (USCG) ability to rescue and intercept individuals attempting this dangerous journey. Individuals interdicted at sea who are attempting to enter the United States irregularly are, and will continue to be, subject to repatriation to their home country. DHS continues to maintain its readiness in the maritime domain and has longstanding plans and procedures that govern how to respond to any potential increase in maritime migration.



## Border Processing

CBP Agents and Officers work tirelessly to detect and interdict noncitizens who cross the border. Upon encountering individuals who have entered between POEs, Border Patrol Agents transport them to stations for processing. This includes verifying their identities through a review of their documents and biographic information, as well as the collection of biometric records. Each individual processed by CBP is screened against numerous records systems, including the FBI's Terrorist Screening Database, to determine whether or not they pose a national security or public safety threat. After initial identity verification and record checks, CBP Agents and Officers determine the appropriate processing pathway from the available options, which are determined based on an individual's nationality, age, family status, and results of security screening and vetting. This process, including final processing for each pathway, takes, on average, one to two hours per individual.

Adults and families commonly spend 48 to 72 hours in CBP custody awaiting processing and then transfer or release. During this time, individuals are provided food, water, medical care, clothing, and other necessities to ensure their safety. Upon completion of CBP processing, certain noncitizens may be quickly removed and others may be transferred to ICE for continued detention. Unaccompanied children must be transferred to HHS. Noncitizens not transferred to other government agencies are processed for release during the pendency of their removal proceedings. This often includes enrollment in an ICE Alternatives to Detention (ATD) program and coordination with NGOs to assist with planning for travel away from the border and the provision of other basic services. Noncitizens placed into proceedings will have an opportunity to present their case before an Asylum Officer or Immigration Judge who will review their claims and either order their removal or grant them asylum or other relief in accordance with law.

**Our broken immigration system was not built to manage the migration levels and types we are currently experiencing and is already under strain. However, we have been able to effectively manage these encounters because of prudent planning and execution, the talent and unwavering dedication of the DHS workforce, and our state, local, and community partners.**

Congress designed the U.S. border management system over 25 years ago. At the time, the migrant population largely consisted of single adult males who were seeking employment opportunities. As described above, the populations DHS now encounters at the border are substantially different, including many families and unaccompanied children who are seeking humanitarian relief. The current system is outdated, was further dismantled by the last Administration, and was not built to contend with these demands. Further, social media and other online platforms have increased smugglers' access to potential migrants, creating an environment ripe for manipulation of information with respect to migration policies at the border.

As noted above, we are already managing a high volume of migrant encounters (on average 7,800 over the past three weeks), which is significantly higher than our system was built to manage and process effectively. While CBP, ICE, and our community partners are all strained under current operations, we are processing individuals in a safe, humane, and orderly manner as

a result of improvements we have made over the past year and thanks to the collaboration of outside partners. DHS efforts include capacity building, strengthened logistics and processing (including the deployment of soft-sided facilities and virtual processing), and decompression tactics to ensure U.S. Border Patrol sectors can most efficiently support one another.

## **BORDER SECURITY PLAN**

Building on lessons learned and in preparation for the termination of CDC's Title 42 public health Order, DHS commenced planning exercises in Fall 2021. In February 2022, DHS formally launched the Southwest Border Coordination Center (SBCC), which is coordinating a whole-of-government response to the anticipated increase in border encounters. I designated a Senior Coordinating Official (SCO) to oversee the SBCC, who reports directly to me.

The SBCC has centralized coordination among key government agencies within a single structure to ensure effective, holistic planning and execution. It is staffed by dozens of experienced professionals from across DHS and contains subject matter expert representatives from throughout the federal government. In addition to the full complement of DHS agencies and offices, several federal agencies are supporting the whole-of-government response, including:

- DOS is continuing intensive diplomacy throughout the region designed to limit irregular migration to the Southwest Border;
- DOD will provide, as needed, rapid contracting support for air and ground transportation, as well as land for the establishment of temporary facilities for migrant processing and lodging for housing federal employees near the Southwest Border;
- The Department of Justice (DOJ) is providing transportation support and law enforcement personnel from the Bureau of Prisons and U.S. Marshals Service, and prosecuting smugglers, repeat offenders, and others whose conduct warrants such a response;
- HHS continues to accept the transfer of unaccompanied children from CBP custody, as well as adjudicate requests for medical support via the ESF-8 council, which governs the allocation of Federal medical responses; and,
- The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) is providing intelligence coordination and support to strengthen the capability for early warning of migrant surges at the Southwest Border.

**Building on work to date and informed by input from our partners, we developed and are currently executing the DHS Border Security plan, described below. Our objective continues to be the safe, orderly, and humane processing of noncitizens consistent with our laws to ensure national security and public safety.**

The plan has six pillars: surge resources; increase efficiency to reduce strain on the border; employ an aggressive consequence regime; bolster the capacity of NGOs and partner with state and local partners; go after cartels and smugglers; and work with our regional partners. This comprehensive plan leverages a whole-of-government approach to prepare for and manage the current and anticipated increases in encounters of noncitizens at our Southwest Border.

Across each of the lines of effort, DHS has undertaken a deliberate and methodical approach to readiness prior to and for May 23. Following months of planning based on multiple potential scenarios, we are pre-positioning and expanding available resources. We are also conducting extensive testing of processes that have not been used at scale since the implementation of Title 42 and new approaches like an en route processing capability, which will be explained below. Finally, our preparations culminate with us scaling to meet migration levels as they increase over time by accessing additional resources through interagency agreements and contracts.

## **Border Security Pillar 1: We are surging resources, including personnel, transportation, medical support, and facilities to support border operations.**

### **Increased Personnel**

Over the past several months, we have deployed additional personnel in support of several key functions. First and foremost, we are working to maximize the number of CBP Agents and Officers in the field. As of April 25, CBP has over 23,000 Agents and Officers working along the Southwest Border, over 600 of whom have deployed since February 1 in response to increasing operational demands. The SBCC will continue to augment CBP's operations by bringing in law enforcement agents and officers from other parts of the country as needed.

Additionally, there are currently over 300 civilian Border Patrol Processing Coordinators who work in Border Patrol stations to complete processing duties; the volume of processing has required some Border Patrol Agents to be assigned to processing. Over the next few months, we are on track to deploy over 500 additional full-time and contract processors, which relieves Border Patrol Agents to return to the field and continue their tireless work to secure the border. President Biden's FY 2023 Budget request to Congress proposes hiring an additional 300 Border Patrol Agents and an additional 300 Border Patrol Processing Coordinators. If enacted, this would be the first increase in the number of Border Patrol Agents since 2011.

The SBCC is augmenting CBP's operations by bringing in law enforcement officers and agents from other parts of the country. We are also hiring, contracting for, and soliciting volunteers for administrative processing support to enable law enforcement officers and agents to focus on front-line work.

### **Increased Transportation Capacity**

CBP utilizes air and ground transportation to prevent Border Patrol facilities from becoming overcrowded. This long-standing process enables increased efficiency, while better protecting the health and safety of our workforce and noncitizens. Building on this approach, the SBCC is expanding the capacity for lateral movements of noncitizens within and between Border Patrol sectors to help relieve overcrowded sectors quickly. For example, CBP will complete a blanket purchase agreement to contract for 394 additional bus movements per day by April 29. CBP can currently move about 4,900 people per day and this additional capacity will enable the movement of an additional 4,100 people per day, almost double, with the potential for further expansion. The SBCC has secured eight U.S. Bureau of Prisons buses with supporting personnel to replace buses and drivers currently staffed by Border Patrol Agents. Those Border Patrol Agents currently staffing buses will then be able to return to the field and perform their critical



law enforcement and border security missions. The SBCC is also finalizing an interagency agreement with ICE for contracted ground transportation resources for an additional 40 bus movements per day and air movements for family units.

### Additional Medical Support

It is among DHS's top priorities to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of those in DHS care and custody, the DHS workforce, and surrounding communities. To this end, we have invested in ensuring that we have appropriate and accessible medical care, including for those with unique vulnerabilities, medical conditions, and for tender-aged children. The SBCC is working to make medical resources available by the end of April to provide urgent clinical care for a planning scenario of 18,000 noncitizens in CBP custody at any given time. The SBCC has developed a medical support plan, which has been reviewed by interagency medical experts, and is currently determining which federal agencies can provide support through an interagency agreement signed with DOD, HHS, USCG, and FEMA.

Beginning in 2021, DHS rapidly scaled its COVID-19 vaccine program to noncitizens in ICE custody. The provision of vaccines, coupled with the testing of noncitizens on intake and rigorous isolation and quarantine protocols, has led to markedly low morbidity and mortality in ICE facilities. Separately, on March 28, 2022, DHS expanded its COVID-19 vaccine program to include noncitizens in CBP custody with a goal to expand to 24 sites by May 23. All Title 8, age-eligible, non-citizens are eligible for the CBP COVID-19 vaccine program and receive their first dose prior to onward travel. Additionally, at the highest-volume CBP sectors, unaccompanied children are tested on intake for COVID-19 and, if positive, are triaged for immediate movement to HHS facilities. These mitigation measures at CBP and ICE have kept COVID-19 rates among noncitizens at or lower than surrounding communities during most of 2021 and 2022.

### Increased CBP's Border Holding Capacity

We have worked to increase CBP's holding capacity, currently at over 17,000 compared to less than 13,000 in January 2021. This includes three soft-sided facility expansions totaling approximately 1,300 in holding capacity initiated in the past two months and one that will be completed in mid-May. There are additional facility expansions still in the planning phase. By April 27, CBP will also complete its assessment of DOD sites for potential additional temporary facilities.

### **Border Security Pillar 2: We are increasing CBP processing efficiency and moving with deliberate speed to mitigate potential overcrowding at Border Patrol stations and alleviate the burden on the surrounding border communities.**

As noted above, CBP's goal at Border Patrol stations is to hold noncitizens in a safe, orderly, and humane environment; ensure appropriate security screening; and to quickly process and transfer screened noncitizens out of CBP custody to ensure that facilities do not become overcrowded, while facilitating the lawful trade and travel that is critical to our economy. CBP, which initially encounters and apprehends migrants, does not have sufficient capacity or resources in its short-term facilities to hold individuals for over 72 hours. In the case of unaccompanied children, CBP

must, by law, transfer these children to the custody of the HHS Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within 72 hours of encounter.

CBP will continue to achieve these goals by employing several strategies, such as transferring noncitizens from stations that are over capacity to those that have capacity and transferring them to ICE ERO for Expedited Removal and detention, where appropriate. The SBCC is also launching the following three new initiatives to support decompression efforts, which ensure the continued integrity of our security screening processes: enhanced central processing center, en route processing, and streamlined processing. Further, CBP is working to increase processing efficiency at POEs to allow noncitizens to present for inspection in a safe and orderly manner.

### Enhanced Central Processing Centers (ECPC)

Processing a noncitizen upon apprehension and entering them into immigration removal proceedings involves multiple steps, multiple electronic systems, and, often, multiple federal agencies. Specific issues include the referral process from CBP to ICE, coordination between CBP and ICE on custody and transportation of noncitizens, and coordination between CBP and HHS on the transfer of unaccompanied children. To address these challenges, the SBCC is testing and rapidly developing a model that will co-locate CBP, ICE, NGOs, and possibly other entities at ECPCs to eliminate any inefficiencies and more rapidly process noncitizens. This innovative model will allow CBP to quickly triage noncitizens it encounters based on risk, ensuring that higher risk individuals are held in secure, hardened facilities until they are placed in detention, while lower risk individuals are processed quickly and humanely at facilities that do not require as significant a law enforcement presence.

This will allow the Border Patrol to focus more of its agents on its priority mission to secure our border rather than processing and administrative duties. ICE personnel will be on-site in order to minimize delays associated with referrals, and NGOs will be present as well to provide legal orientation services and onward transportation for those low-risk individuals who are ultimately released on ATD. The first ECPC will be operational in Laredo, Texas effective April 29. Informed by this experience, the SBCC will complete a plan for the development of additional enhanced central processing centers beyond Laredo.

### En Route Processing

As noted above, processing of noncitizens at CBP facilities can be time intensive. When noncitizens are transported to alleviate overcrowding, the time in transit is an opportunity to process those being transported. By testing and refining operational plans to complete processing of noncitizens while in transit, the SBCC can move noncitizens out of CBP facilities faster, while retaining the integrity of biometric and biographic screening processes and ensuring noncitizens apprehended at the border are placed expeditiously into removal proceedings.

As part of DHS's strategic use of existing Title 8 processing pathways, this processing would be reserved for family units, especially from countries that do not accept repatriations quickly or at all. The SBCC is actively engaging with cities that are located within a six-hour drive of the border and will employ en route processing to relieve pressure on Border Patrol facilities and border communities. The SBCC is working closely with local governments, including law

enforcement, in these cities to ensure that local governments and receiving NGOs have the support and resources they need, as described further below.

The SBCC is testing en route processing and is continuing to develop options to expand its capacity further. In particular:

- *Del Rio to Laredo*: The SBCC has developed a concept of operations for en route processing from Del Rio to Laredo that has already been successfully tested.
- *Bus Technology*: Border Patrol is outfitting buses with necessary technology to support processing requirements while in transit.

### Streamlining Processing Methods

Processing a single noncitizen for a Notice to Appear (NTA) can take two to three hours, including the time to complete the processing documents and subsequent review between CBP and ICE to ensure accuracy. An NTA is a charging document, issued by ICE or CBP, which initiates removal proceedings against a noncitizen, and specifies the date and time for the noncitizen to appear in immigration court. Last year, DHS launched the Southwest Border Technology Integration Program to digitize and automate noncitizen processing. Today, over 70 percent of Title 8 cases are reviewed and signed digitally by CBP. We project this has saved over 20,000 hours of processing time already.

The SBCC is identifying and implementing further technological and administrative improvements to reduce overall processing time of noncitizens, while also maintaining security. For example, the SBCC is focused on expanding digital processing towards a fully digital “A-File,” which is shared across CBP, ICE, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and DOJ throughout the immigration lifecycle. Digital A-Files for voluntary returns and digital review and signatures for other disposition types will be implemented by May 23. DHS will continue to focus on digitizing all other elements of the A-File to maximize efficiency. In addition, the SBCC is eliminating administrative redundancy by identifying and removing certain forms in the document exchange between CBP and ICE.

### Port of Entry Processing

The imposition of the Title 42 public health Order severely restricted the ability of undocumented noncitizens to present at POEs for inspection and processing under Title 8. The closure of this immigration pathway for much of the time Title 42 has been in effect has driven people between POEs at the hands of the cartels. Returning to robust POE processing is an essential part of DHS border security efforts. Beginning in the summer of 2021, DHS restarted processing vulnerable individuals through POEs under Title 8, on a case-by-case basis for humanitarian reasons, pursuant to the exception criteria laid out in CDC’s Title 42 Order. These efforts, which we have recently expanded, offer individuals in vulnerable situations a safe and orderly method to submit their information in advance and present at POEs for inspection and subsequent immigration processing under Title 8. We also have enhanced Title 8 POE processing through the development of the CBP One mobile application, which powers advanced information submission and appointment scheduling prior to an individual presenting at a POE. We will make this tool publicly available and continue to expand its use to facilitate orderly immigration processing at POEs.



### **Border Security Pillar 3: We are administering consequences for unlawful entry, including removal, detention, and prosecution.**

Attempting to enter the United States without authorization carries potential long-term consequences, including removal from the United States, bars on subsequent admission, and criminal liability. By expeditiously removing individuals who do not have a lawful basis to stay in our country, the United States is making clear that while we are a nation of immigrants, we are also a nation of laws. We will continue fully enforcing those laws, employing a combination of Expedited Removal and removal proceedings before an immigration judge, detaining single adults where appropriate, and referring for prosecution border-related criminal activity.

#### **Expedited Removal**

DHS is preparing to maximize the use of Expedited Removal for populations where removal is possible or likely, consistent with the law, and is working to streamline Expedited Removal processes across relevant federal agencies, with an eye towards quickly removing those who receive a negative credible fear finding while in ICE custody. DHS is increasing the availability of interview facilities and USCIS officers to conduct credible fear interviews, creating an electronic process to refer appeals of negative fear findings to the DOJ Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), and working with partner countries throughout the hemisphere to significantly improve our ability to quickly remove and repatriate individuals with final orders of removal.

Increased use of Expedited Removal serves key law enforcement and operational goals. It is a fair and effective means of efficiently removing those with no lawful basis to remain in the United States. Those subject to Expedited Removal also face a five-year bar on admission from the date of removal and potential criminal prosecution if they seek to unlawfully re-enter, thus serving to deter would-be border crossers.

Single adults placed in Expedited Removal are generally detained throughout the process, making the capacity to detain critical to its effectiveness and to increasing its use. DHS utilizes a network of detention facilities across the country to detain noncitizens who are subject to Expedited Removal, who pose a threat to public safety or national security, to ensure presence at immigration proceedings, and to effectuate removals. As COVID-19 physical distancing restrictions are revised, DHS will regain additional bed space within its existing facility footprint.

#### **Asylum Office Rule**

Individuals in Expedited Removal who establish a credible fear of persecution or torture are currently referred to an immigration court for full consideration of their applications for asylum and related protection. Under the new Asylum Office rule, effective May 31, DHS can instead refer these cases to USCIS for significantly more expeditious adjudication. The new rule will allow DHS and DOJ to conclude certain asylum cases in months instead of years, meaning that those deemed ineligible for asylum can be removed more quickly. While full implementation will take time, this will have a transformative impact on the asylum system.

### Timely Immigration Court Proceedings

For families not processed through Expedited Removal and who are instead placed in removal proceedings, DOJ and DHS have jointly established a new, more efficient process known as the Dedicated Docket to conduct speedier immigration court proceedings that comport with due process. DHS is utilizing the Dedicated Docket for certain family unit members who arrive between POEs at the Southwest Border and are traveling to one of 11 destination cities. Families placed on the Dedicated Docket are prioritized for adjudication and are generally expected to receive final decisions in their cases within 300 days of initiation, as opposed to several years. The Dedicated Docket includes a Family Group Legal Orientation Program in which nonprofit organizations explain the immigration court process and provide referrals to pro bono legal services to support families placed on this Docket.

In addition to the Dedicated Docket, DOJ will continue to operate its long-standing detained docket for individuals in ICE custody, moving cases through the immigration court system in a matter of months, rather than years.

### Prosecuting Border-Related Criminal Activity

DHS will continue to refer border-related criminal activity to DOJ for prosecution where warranted, including that of smugglers, repeat offenders, and other noncitizens whose conduct warrants such law enforcement action. We also continue to enforce CBP's Repeat Offender initiative to target recidivism. This enforcement regime has improved DHS's ability to leverage legal consequences to deter irregular migration while conserving limited processing resources.

### **Border Security Pillar 4: We are bolstering the capacity of NGOs to receive noncitizens after they have been processed by CBP and are awaiting the results of their immigration removal proceedings. And, we are ensuring appropriate coordination with and support for state, local, and community leaders to help mitigate increased impacts to their communities.**

Increased migration levels put additional pressure not only on DHS personnel and resources, but also on border communities and NGO partners who play a critical role in helping noncitizens who are released from DHS custody for the pendency of their removal proceedings. Noncitizens who are not subject to ICE detention are screened by CBP as described above, entered into immigration removal proceedings, and permitted to travel to onward destinations, where they are subject to ongoing supervision. Once a noncitizen is released from custody by DHS, the Department is no longer operationally engaged in their transportation, medical care, or shelter. Nonetheless, our goal is to help communities alleviate the pressures they experience by expanding NGO capacity, through communication and coordination, and grants through the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP). We are also exploring other ways to provide assistance to communities and welcome the ongoing dialogue we have with local leaders to that end.

### Bolstering NGO Capacity

NGOs play a critical role in providing care and support with onward travel to noncitizens who are entered into immigration removal proceedings, not subject to detention, and released from

CBP custody. The SBCC has assessed and is tracking NGO capacity and sharing information to ensure there is a common operating picture across all relevant parties, to include gaps that can be remediated with external assistance.

The EFSP, administered by DHS through FEMA, supplements and expands ongoing work of local NGOs to meet the urgent needs of local agencies assisting the unique and vulnerable migration population encountered by DHS. In FY 2022, Congress authorized \$150 million for EFSP Southwest Border support, and this month, FEMA has taken necessary steps to ensure these funds can be accessed by eligible partners in short order. We are working to ensure the eligibility criteria for EFSP can cover the broadest set of possible needs and will provide more information for entities that are not familiar with EFSP by the end of April.

For the subset of non-citizens who may be released from custody directly into a community (i.e., those who cannot be released in coordination with an NGO due to capacity constraints or other issues), DHS is defining required criteria for CBP leadership to reference when determining whether and how to release individuals. This is particularly important given the potential for increases in this population going forward. The criteria will include safety checks, notification to local officials, information on local resources and legal services, and required documentation. The SBCC will complete an operational checklist, informed by feedback from our local stakeholders including law enforcement partners, also by the end of April.

Additionally, by the beginning of May, the SBCC will complete an updated information package to distribute to all noncitizens released from federal custody. The update was designed to ensure individuals more clearly understand their obligations and requirements for compliance with the enforcement and removal process.

### **Communication with State, Local, and Community Leaders**

To ensure close operational coordination and support ongoing local planning efforts, the SBCC and CBP leaders continue to engage extensively with state and local governments, including law enforcement entities, public health authorities, and NGOs, including in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, as well as other locations as needed. This regular coordination includes a focus on noncitizen transport and capacity planning, resolving logistical challenges, and addressing community concerns through shared solutions. These and other coordination sessions will increase as operations necessitate.

### **Border Security Pillar 5: We are targeting and disrupting the transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and smugglers who take advantage of and profit from vulnerable migrants, and who seek to traffic drugs into our country.**

DHS works at home and abroad to identify, investigate, and interdict the TCOs that smuggle people and drugs into our country. Human smuggling organizations peddle misinformation that the border is open, in order to profit from the vulnerability of migrants. DHS is targeting these organizations, in close collaboration with other federal agencies, state and local law enforcement, and international partners. While this has been a consistent priority, our efforts have intensified in recent months.

### Migration Intelligence

Building on the Intelligence Community's existing work to monitor migration activity in the Western Hemisphere, in April, ODNI stood up a Migration Intelligence Cell with the goal of providing advanced geographic and time-based warning of large human smuggling movements in the region and analysis and targeting information for disruption activities. The Migration Intelligence Cell has highlighted to the entire Intelligence Community the priority of human smuggling to prompt additional focus. This intelligence will be used for disruption activities as well as border security and management actions.

### Disrupting Smuggling Networks

Building on existing efforts, in April 2022 DHS surged disruption efforts in partnership with other federal agencies along six coordinated and interconnected lines of effort. These include:

- Operation Expanded Impact led by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), a division of ICE. HSI is focusing its investigative efforts along the Southwest Border to launch additional criminal investigations of the organizations taking advantage of vulnerable individuals, working to detect, disrupt, and dismantle TCOs involved in narcotics, human smuggling, and human trafficking. HSI has assigned approximately 250 special agents and criminal analysts to carry out investigations in the United States;
- Operation Sentinel, which is an interagency counter-network operation targeting TCOs affiliated with the smuggling of migrants;
- Joint Task Force Alpha, a DOJ-led effort to target smuggling and trafficking groups;
- Blue Indigo, led by DOJ and DHS to disrupt cartel operations and illicit networks in South Texas;
- Financial disruption conducted by the Treasury Department; and,
- The ODNI cell referenced above.

This is the largest surge of resources and disruptive activities against human smuggling networks in recent memory. So far this month, these lines of effort produced over 2,500 arrests, investigations, and disruptions of smuggling infrastructure, such as buses and safe houses, among other actions, and have slowed, stopped, or reversed the flows of thousands of migrants. This activity represents a dramatic increase in human smuggling network-related disruption events in FY 2022 compared to the same time and in the same region in FY 2021.

Partnerships with Mexican and Central American counterparts have resulted in multiple significant enforcement actions against human smuggling and trafficking groups operating in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. In Guatemala, efforts have focused on the indictments and extraditions of Guatemalan human smugglers to face prosecution. In Honduras, DHS has provided robust support to Operation Scorpion, a border surge initiative of the Honduran National Police that targets human smugglers and traffickers.

### Drug Seizures and Enforcement

DHS has increased efforts to stem the flow of illegal drugs into the United States. In FY 2021, HSI Special Agents conducted 12,920 criminal arrests and seized over 2.4 million pounds of narcotics, which included 14,530 pounds of fentanyl. This compares to FY 2020 seizures of more than 1.4 million pounds. In addition, HSI Special Agents seized more than \$188 million in



total currency and assets. In FY 2021, CBP seized 900,000 pounds of narcotics, a significant increase over the previous year.

DHS employs a multi-layered approach to countering narcotics trafficking, in close partnership with other federal and partner government agencies. CBP's National Targeting Center uses advanced analytics and targeting capabilities to identify critical logistics, financial, and communication nodes and exploit areas of weakness in opioid trafficking networks. ICE HSI Special Agents exchange information, coordinate investigations, and facilitate enforcement actions with law enforcement partners abroad to deter the ability of TCOs to smuggle drugs, people, and contraband into and out of the United States.

**Border Security Pillar 6: We are deterring irregular migration south of our border, in partnership with the Department of State, other federal agencies, and nations throughout the Western Hemisphere, to ensure that we are sharing the responsibility throughout the region.**

Deterring migrants who will not meet the criteria for asylum is an important tool to alleviate pressure at the border. As described earlier, that is a challenge. Across the world, more people are displaced from their homes than at any time since World War II. While the United States is a destination country for those fleeing their homes, we do not experience the phenomenon alone. Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and many other countries in the region are experiencing increases in migration, especially of Venezuelans, but of other nationalities as well. In light of the increased levels we are experiencing, DHS, working with DOS and other partners, has intensified our work to manage and deter irregular migration throughout the region.

**New Bilateral Arrangements on Migration and Protection**

On March 15, I traveled to Costa Rica and joined President Alvarado in announcing a bilateral Migration Arrangement, which outlines our shared commitment to both manage migrant flows and promote economic growth in the region. On April 19, the U.S. government signed a Bilateral Arrangement on Migration and Protection with the Government of Panama, similarly detailing our collaborative commitments to improve migration management, expand stabilization efforts, and increase access to legal pathways and protection for those in the region. DHS and DOS are actively engaged with other countries in the region to advance similar bilateral arrangements, as well as a Hemispheric Declaration on Migration and Protection to be completed at the upcoming Summit of the Americas in June 2022.

**Partnership with the Government of Mexico**

The Biden-Harris Administration continues to maintain a close partnership with the Government of Mexico to stem irregular migration, which includes creating viable legal pathways, facilitating lawful trade and travel, and combating the shared dangers of transnational organized crime. Last month, I made my fourth official visit to Mexico City where I met with President López Obrador to intensify our shared commitment to promoting lawful trade and travel and developing a regional approach to migration management.

## In-Region Messaging

DHS coordinates closely with DOS to track trends, share research, and coordinate messaging to counter disinformation that smugglers use to victimize vulnerable migrants. Our approach has included paid advertising on radio and digital platforms and press conferences and media interviews in source and transit countries. These messages counter disinformation propagated by human smugglers and warn migrants of the dangers of being exploited and facing death at the hands of unscrupulous criminal organizations.

## CONCLUSION

**Despite the efforts of our dedicated DHS workforce and our partners executing this comprehensive plan, a significant increase in migrant encounters will substantially strain our system even further. We will address this challenge, but it will take time, and we need partnership and support to do so successfully. We are also operating within a fundamentally broken immigration system that only Congress can fix.**

As described above, DHS and its federal and community partners have been taking steps for months to prepare for the lifting of Title 42, while operating within a system that is not designed to handle the current volume of migrants nor the increased volume we expect over the coming months. The preparations and deliberate planning detailed in this memorandum will enable us to manage and mitigate known and unanticipated challenges more effectively, while protecting the safety and security of our communities. But notwithstanding the efforts described in this paper, a significant increase will substantially strain our system even further.

We are especially mindful of the following challenges and potential developments at higher levels of encounters:

- For several months, CBP, ICE, NGOs, and other critical partners have been managing levels beyond the capacity for which their infrastructure was designed and resourced, meaning additional increases will create further pressure and potential overcrowding in specific locations along the border.
- With NGOs strained, there is a potential for a higher number of single adults and families to be released into communities without NGO or other sponsor support. The federal government has few tools or authorities to support the related impacts on local communities, though we are actively working to develop more.
- Depending on levels, land ports of entry could experience processing delays and disruptions at specific points in time.
- Communication and coordination across state, local, and community leaders requires good faith engagement of all parties, to help ensure we can effectively manage these developments together.

We welcome partners' support in mitigating these risks and challenges. We appreciate Congress' support in FY 2022, appropriating \$1.4 billion for DHS to manage an increase in Southwest Border encounters. DHS is currently managing these resources responsibly and has submitted the required spend plan to Congress. DHS expenditures for the \$1.4 billion appropriated in FY 2022 include but are not limited to: soft-sided facilities; medical contracts;

transportation; and support for NGOs through the EFSP. DHS will also need to utilize its limited transfer and reprogramming authority once the \$1.4 billion is exhausted. Should additional resources be necessary to manage a sustained increase in encounters, DHS will engage Congress on any potential need for supplemental appropriations.

Over the past 15 months, the Department of Homeland Security has demonstrated time and time again our ability to tackle significant challenges, while operating consistent with our laws and our values. From responding to unprecedented levels of migration and ensuring the safety of individuals in our care to vetting and processing tens of thousands of evacuees from Afghanistan and Ukraine, we have consistently risen to the challenge in extremely difficult circumstances. We will continue to work tirelessly on behalf of the American people, but there is broad agreement that our immigration system is fundamentally broken. As it has since its first day in office, the Biden-Harris Administration continues to call on Congress to pass legislation that holistically addresses the root causes of migration, strengthens border security, fixes our immigration system, and improves legal pathways.