

**United States Senate**  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0309

January 10, 2024

Emergency Food and Shelter Program National Board  
United Way Worldwide  
701 North Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-2064

Dear Members of Emergency Food and Shelter Program National Board:

We write in support of Pima County's urgent request regarding its funding under the Emergency Food and Shelter Program for humanitarian services (EFSP-H) 2022 allocation (HR22) to prevent the collapse of the county's Southwest Border Coalition operation. Arizona is facing a growing, unsustainable border crisis that has increased the demand for Pima County's and its nongovernmental partners' services to unprecedented levels, well beyond that of years past. We urge the Board to consider Pima County's request and take every step possible to ensure the County has access to spend its EFSP-H HR22 funding.

Pima County's request comes as the Border Patrol Tucson Sector has experienced a dramatic increase in legally processed asylum seekers (LPAS) released by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) in Arizona. The County manages the Southwest Border Coalition, a three-county Southern Arizona service area (Pima County, Santa Cruz County, and Cochise County), situated within the Tucson Sector area of responsibility (AOR). The Tucson Sector has become the busiest Southwest Border sector surpassing all others, including the busy Texas sectors.<sup>1</sup> The pattern of migrants arriving in Arizona via the Tucson Sector has continued to increase over the last year with more arriving in the Tucson Sector compared to all other Southwest Border sectors.<sup>2</sup>

In federal fiscal year (FY) 2022, most asylum seekers arrived at the Arizona-Mexico border via the Yuma Sector. At that time, Pima County assisted with the provision of humanitarian services, such as sheltering and transportation, largely to LPAS who were laterally transferred to the Tucson Sector to decompress Yuma. Demand for Pima County services, however, increased as the Tucson Sector processed an increasing number of asylum seekers, which spiked in June 2023. Since then, the number of asylum seekers encountered and processed in the Tucson Sector

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<sup>1</sup> The Tucson Sector has consistently seen a higher number of migrants compared to all other Southwest Border sectors since June of 2023. For comparison, in November 2023, the Tucson Sector saw 50% more migrants, 64,638 migrants, compared to the next busiest sector, Del Rio, which saw 21,686 fewer migrants. That trend continued in December. This has resulted in an increasing demand for humanitarian services from the Southwest Border Coalition.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Nationwide Encounters: U.S. Border Patrol and Office of Field Operations Encounters by Area of Responsibility and Component, (Last Accessed Jan. 2, 2024), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters>

has continued to increase every month and has made Tucson the busiest sector in the Southwest border. In November of 2023, the Tucson Sector processed 64,638 migrants. This is the equivalent of a year-over-year increase of nearly 590% compared to November of 2022—the month in which the Board allocated the EFSP-H HR 22 funding. This sharp increase in the number of LPAS processed in the Tucson Sector is unprecedented and has caused rapidly accelerating consumption of Pima County’s grant revenue on hand. It is indisputable that the Tucson Sector, and the humanitarian service providers within the sector, are busier now than ever, which has led to a sharp increase in use of the County’s services for which the EFSP-H HR22 funding is desperately needed.

The crisis on Arizona’s border is not merely a matter of numbers but also of geography that makes humanitarian services complex and costly. For example, compared to the second busiest border sector, Del Rio, the Tucson Sector covers a significantly larger area of the US-Mexico border with 262 miles in its AOR and is unique as it is made up of mostly rural communities with less than 20,000 people. This sprawl and lack of infrastructure in these remote communities require complex logistics and coordination of resources between Pima County and its nonprofit partners. As part of their humanitarian operations, Pima County ensures asylum seekers recently released from CBP custody are transported from several small towns along the Arizona-Mexico border to service providers in Tucson and Phoenix for access to shelter and transportation. The County’s grant funds serve to help operate the only two congregate overnight shelters in the Southwest Border Coalition’s service area. Shelter operation is augmented by use of hotel rooms and hotel shelter designed to specifically provide isolation and quarantine to ensure public health. Since 2019, Pima County has coordinated transportation and/or shelter for over 350,000 LPAS released in local Arizona communities throughout the Tucson Sector.

As the border continues to worsen, Arizona communities are seeing the impacts of strained resources. From September 12, 2023, through November 30, 2023, over 19,000 LPAS have been released by CBP into small Arizona border communities, including in the cities of Nogales (Santa Cruz County) as well as Douglas, Bisbee, and Naco (Cochise County). Every day, Pima County, through the Southwest Border Coalition, works to coordinate transportation, sheltering and care for hundreds of LPAS from these small border towns, all of which are between 60 to 120 miles away. Pima County has relied on federal funding, such as EFSP-H, to conduct these operations. Pima County’s work with the Southwest Border Coalition is critical to averting a dire situation where Arizona’s small border communities must shoulder the burden of legally processed asylum seekers released on their streets without support—exactly the disastrous outcome that Congress aimed to prevent through its funding of EFSP-H.

In addition to doing the hard work of running this logistically complex and demanding humanitarian operation, over the last year, Pima County has continued to identify ways to reduce costs and improve budgeting and resources to reduce the per migrant cost of operations. In doing so, they have augmented operations with other federal and state dollars and have significantly reduced per-migrant costs. Once federal funding runs out, however, the Southwest Border Coalition operations will collapse, risking the release of thousands of migrants into the streets of Arizona border communities without shelter or support. Therefore, any available federal dollars

must be made accessible for Pima County's use of these services, which are critical to keep migrants and Arizona communities safe.

We urge the Board to give full and fair consideration to Pima County's request regarding its EFSP-H HR22 funding of approximately \$5.2 million at the Board's meeting on January 12, 2024. It is clear that Pima County's request is justified. We encourage the board to consider any and all possible approaches to provide Pima County access to this much-needed federal funding to help sustain its operations on the border.

We request an update on the Board's decision as soon as possible following the Board's January 12th meeting.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Mark Kelly in blue ink.

Mark Kelly

United State Senator

Handwritten signature of Kyrsten Sinema in blue ink.

Kyrsten Sinema

United States Senator