House Bill 3782

Testimony Before the Texas House Committee on State Affairs

By Selene Rodriguez, Assistant Director of Federal Affairs

Chairman Hunter, Members of the Committee:

My name is Selene Rodriguez, and I represent the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am testifying in support of House Bill 3782.

Gov. Abbott and the Texas Legislature have done a great job of working to ensure that Texas can work toward regaining and maintaining operational control of the Texas–Mexico border. The state has provided historic funding to various state agencies to support Operation Lone Star and border security programs.

Due to the rapid increase in cartel-related crimes and illegal migration into Texas, the state has had to adapt and learn quickly how to defend itself and its people. We have begun laying the groundwork in Texas to curb continued migrant surges, human smuggling, and drug trafficking, now that we know the federal government can abandon its duties and force Texas to fend for itself.

House Bill 3782 will continue to lay that groundwork.

While the bulk of the mission is taken on by the Texas Department of Public Safety and the Texas Military Department, there are other agencies that receive border security funding and are required to report their budget, expenses, and outcomes to the Legislature and the Legislative Budget Board.

With many large state agencies and programs having a stake in the mission of securing Texas and America, House Bill 3782 would establish a Border Security Advisory Council to advise the governor and the Legislature, by providing specialized expertise and strategic guidance as well as providing clarity and purpose in the mission. Council representatives can provide unique perspectives and identify programmatic issues and develop procedures for streamlining agency decision-making.

The state has made a great stride toward consolidating a leadership council between these state agencies by adding the role of the first ever border czar, Mike Banks. In his role, he collaborates with the Texas Military Department, the Department of Public Safety, and other state agencies, local officials, and Texas landowners to carry out Operation Lone Star's mission of deterring and repelling migrants from illegally crossing into Texas from Mexico.

Mr. Banks also advises the governor on border security situations and strategies, including the planning of operations ahead of migrant surges. Appointing Mr. Banks to this role is a great first step toward a more effective, organized, and economical mission of securing the Texas–Mexico border.

Establishing this council can also provide more clarity to Texas taxpayers that fund this important mission, and Americans across the country who are closely paying attention to what Texas is doing. This council can serve as an enforcing mechanism to ensure that included agencies are routinely collaborating and unified in the mission as well as reporting accurate and timely data.

We commend the Legislature for considering this bill and continued efforts for transparency and mission clarity.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Selene Rodriguez is the assistant director of federal affairs at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. In this role, she conducts research on public policy issues; assists the Foundation in academic publication; educates lawmakers and members of the public on Foundation research; and provides formal testimony to local, state, and federal entities. Prior to this position, Rodriguez served in the Marine Corps as an intelligence specialist and completed an internship at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. Born and raised in Del Rio, Texas, Rodriguez graduated from Texas State University with a B.A. in political science and is currently a graduate student. She has a passion for spending time with her family and volunteering in local community programs and political organizations.

Texas Public Policy Foundation