



## HB 6: Testimony Before the Texas House Committee on Appropriations

*By Carine Martinez and Selene Rodriguez, Secure & Sovereign Frontier*

### **Chairman Bonnen and Members of the Committee:**

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Carine Martinez, I am the campaign director for Secure & Sovereign Frontier at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and I am testifying in support of House Bill 6, which would appropriate \$1.5 billion to the Trusted Programs within the Office of the Governor for the construction, operation, and maintenance of border-barrier infrastructure.

The Foundation strongly believes in limited government, and that one of the government's legitimate roles is the preservation of liberty and security. As Texans, we know that only our *state* government will step up and do the job.

To claim any meaningful level of border security, the government must take every reasonable action to control who and what enters. Today, it is the Mexican cartels and their willing partners in the Mexican government who have full control over border crossings between ports of entry.

Since February 2021, President Biden's first full month in office, Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has encountered more than 6 million aliens at the southwest border, 5.4 million of whom were apprehended by Border Patrol agents after entering illegally. Further, since the start of Texas' Operation Lone Star in March 2021, Texas law enforcement has made over 476,200 illegal immigrant apprehensions—not to mention, over 1.7 million known gotaways.

In fiscal year 23, Border Patrol agents seized over 2,700 lbs of fentanyl between ports of entry which is more than enough lethal doses to kill the entire U.S. population. CBP noted in September that fentanyl seizures have increased more than 800% since fiscal year 2019, and fiscal year 2023 seizures of fentanyl have already surpassed the fiscal year 2022 seizure total. In Texas, law enforcement has seized over 400 million lethal doses of fentanyl.

As the state with nearly two-thirds of the U.S. southern border, allowing this public-safety and national-security crisis to unfold unhindered is certainly not an option for Texas.

That is why the Foundation supports an aggressive and unprecedented effort by the state to both stand in the gap and stand up to a federal government that has neglected its first duty to protect its citizens.

Thanks to the courageous and creative efforts of state lawmakers and agencies, Texas can and will work to fill the gap and take its border back.

Texas is the first state to build its own border wall. This is a tool in the border-security toolbox that has proven to be effective. A 2020 DHS report states:

“Since the U.S. Border Patrol began constructing border barriers nearly 30 years ago, these barriers have proved to be a critical component in gaining operational control of the border. Deploying the wall system in high priority areas—particularly urban areas where illegal border crossers can quickly vanish into the surrounding community—allows the USBP to decide where border crossings take place, not smugglers, and the USBP can deploy personnel and technology in complement to the border barrier.”

They concluded the report by saying: “The results speak for themselves: illegal drug, border crossings, and human smuggling activities have decreased in areas where barriers are deployed.”

Border wall construction is intended to provide persistent impedance and denial to illegal cross-border activity. In 2020, the El Paso Sector reported “a significant reduction in drug and smuggling activities in areas where the new border wall system was built.” Infrastructure like this is humane for migrants as it pushes them to seek safer, legal pathways into the country and allows law enforcement the chance to respond quickly and determine who is coming into the United States.

In September 2023, DHS released a Homeland Threat Assessment for 2024 which notes that terrorists and criminal actors are exploiting the elevated flow and increasingly complex security environment, and that “individuals with potential terrorism connections continue to attempt to enter the Homeland.” Further, they even declared that these complex challenges we are facing *are likely to continue*.

We don’t have the luxury to not spend this money to secure our border. We stand behind our state leaders who are calling on the federal government to reimburse the state of Texas for the billions of dollars we have to spend to secure the border in their absence.

The state of Texas cannot fall to the transnational criminal organizations that are working tirelessly to defeat us, because if Texas falls, there is no other Texas to turn to. House Bill 6 would empower Texas to rightfully fulfill its responsibility to protect its citizens.

We urge its passage.

