

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 256

By: **Ammon Blair**, Texas Public Policy Foundation
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Chairman King, Vice Chairwoman Hernandez, and distinguished members of the committee,

My name is Ammon Blair, and I am a Senior Fellow at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. I am honored to appear before you today in strong support of House Bill 256.

I bring 22 years of military and law enforcement experience, including service in the United States Army and the U.S. Border Patrol. During my tenure, I served as a Collateral Intelligence Agent, where I was tasked with investigating fake family units, uncovering fraudulent documents related to minors, and countering the recycling and trafficking of children across the border. I witnessed firsthand how cartels weaponize our humanitarian policies against us, using children as commodities in a system designed for their protection. The need for House Bill 256 is a response to a real, systemic threat that demands urgent action.

Texas must act where Washington has failed.

House Bill 256 is not merely a policy correction. It is a necessary defense against organized criminal exploitation of children, an assertion of state sovereignty in the face of federal abdication, and a statement that Texas will not turn a blind eye to modern-day human trafficking on its soil.

I. The Scope of the Problem: Recycling, Smuggling, and Trafficking of Children

Cartels and smuggling organizations understand that U.S. immigration law treats family units differently than single adults. They have leveraged this knowledge by pairing unrelated adults with children to create fake family units, banking on federal authorities' limited ability to verify claims quickly and exploit the "catch-and-release" policies ([Arthur, 2019](#); [Davis, 2022](#)).

Children were also "recycled"—meaning they are smuggled across the border with an unrelated adult to secure easier release under U.S. immigration protocols, then sent back to Mexico or Central America to repeat the process with another smuggler. CBP operations in El Paso and elsewhere have uncovered multiple recycling schemes ([U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2019](#)).

Investigations have confirmed cases where children were drugged to make them compliant during smuggling attempts, including the administration of marijuana-laced candies (Bradley, 2024; Resendiz, n.d.). Children have been intercepted at our border not just as pawns of desperate illegal aliens, but as commodities trafficked by sophisticated networks that understand how to manipulate gaps in U.S. policy (Oliveira, 2024). According to investigative reports and CBP disclosures, these recycling operations directly feed into broader criminal enterprises once the children are inside the United States, including sex trafficking and forced labor (Dreier, 2023).

This is not simply an immigration loophole; it is child trafficking in its purest form. The United States is now the top destination for child sex trafficking victims worldwide, and the trafficking corridors begin at our southern border (Dinan, 2024). As early as 2015, DHS whistleblowers like Jason Piccolo have exposed how federal officials knowingly allowed thousands of unaccompanied alien children to be released to criminal sponsors inside the United States (Piccolo, 2019). Senate Judiciary Committee correspondence further documented that these risks were both foreseeable and known—and yet nothing was done (Grassley & Cornyn, 2015). Washington knew. Washington failed. Texas cannot afford to wait for a federal course correction that never comes.

II. Federal Failure to Maintain Rapid DNA Testing

To combat this abuse, the Trump Administration initiated a Rapid DNA Testing Pilot Program in 2019 (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2019). Under this program, individuals suspected of falsely claiming familial relationships were tested quickly using non-invasive buccal swabs, with results available in hours rather than days or weeks.

The rapid familial DNA testing program, launched through a \$5.2 million contract with Bode Cellmark Forensics, proved highly effective. DHS reported that between 15% and 30% of all family claims tested under the program were fraudulent. Rapid DNA testing disrupted the cartels' strategy by immediately exposing false claims, enabling CBP to separate minors from unrelated adults and refer cases for criminal investigation or child protective services (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2021).

Despite the program's success, the Biden Administration allowed the federal familial DNA testing program to lapse on May 31, 2023, disregarding clear operational needs and federal judicial mandates. (U.S. Customs and Border Protection, 2023). In January 2020, the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California, in the case of Ms. L. v. ICE, ordered that suspected fraudulent family units could not be separated based on doubts about biological relationships unless DNA testing was conducted first (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, 2022, p. 5). The rapid familial DNA program was established in part to ensure compliance with this court order, protecting children from wrongful separation while also preventing traffickers from exploiting minors.

The consequences were immediate and catastrophic: without rapid DNA verification, Border Patrol agents were forced to release adults and minors together based solely on their claims, even when documentation was suspect or prior encounters raised serious red flags.

This decision directly undermined child safety and emboldened traffickers ([Bensman, 2023](#)). It represented a willful dismantling of one of the most effective safeguards ever deployed against cartel-driven child exploitation. Congressional leaders, including Senator Marco Rubio and several colleagues, issued urgent letters demanding the reinstatement of the program, citing the direct threat to vulnerable children ([Scott, 2023](#)).

Instead, U.S. Border Patrol headquarters made a one-time ad hoc purchase of 50 BODE rapid DNA testing kits, distributed them selectively to certain sectors, and shifted the burden of funding and sustaining DNA operations onto sectors. This patchwork, decentralized approach bears no resemblance to the comprehensive, structured program that was originally established to protect minors and ensure compliance with the court order ([Styrna, 2023](#)). It left wide gaps in verification, creating a dangerous environment ripe for exploitation by the cartels ([The American Presidency Project, 2019](#)).

III. Why HB 256 Is Urgent and Necessary

Importantly, HB 256 is proactive. It ensures that Texas infrastructure and interagency agreements are in place before the next mass migration surge—rather than responding reactively when humanitarian crises are already underway.

Without this capability, Texas will remain vulnerable to the very abuses that have already been documented: fraudulent family units, child recycling, trafficking under cover of asylum claims, and foreign terrorist organizations exploiting federal policy gaps.

The stakes extend beyond Texas. Every fake family unit that successfully crosses our border strengthens Mexican cartel networks operating throughout the United States ([U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, 2023](#)). Every child recycled, trafficked, or abused as a result of federal inaction represents not only a humanitarian tragedy but a strategic breach of our national security ([Rowley, 2024](#)). The cartels that manipulate immigration loopholes to smuggle children are the same organizations flooding our cities with fentanyl, laundering billions of dollars through CCP financial systems, and embedding their operations into American communities ([Waters, 2023](#)). Their tactics are not random acts of criminality. They are deliberate methods to weaken and exploit the United States from within.

House Bill 256 restores a vital tool to protect the most vulnerable: children.

It strengthens Texas' frontline defenses against cartel-driven human smuggling and trafficking. It balances operational necessity with civil liberties. And it ensures that Texas will never again be dependent on shifting federal political decisions to safeguard its communities and its border. I strongly support House Bill 256.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am available to answer any questions.

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