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Field Hearing: Committee on Homeland Security  
Crisis on the Texas Border: Surge of Unaccompanied Minors

Chairman McCaul, Congressman Cuellar and other honorable members of this Congressional Committee:

My name is Steven McCraw, and I serve as the director of the Texas Department of Public Safety. As you know, I have had the honor to appear before this committee on three previous occasions and provided testimony about the consequences of an unsecured border with Mexico. The latest consequence, and the reason for this hearing, is the dramatic increase in the number of unaccompanied alien children (UAC) risking their lives to be smuggled into the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

These children correctly believe that the U.S. border with Mexico is not secure, and with the assistance of human smugglers, they will be able to arrive on U.S. soil and turn themselves into the U.S. Border Patrol. They also believe that they will have an opportunity to remain with family members living in the U.S., and whether this point is true matters not, as they perceive it as such.

As a result these children, primarily from Central America, continue to make this dangerous journey in record numbers, which has overwhelmed U.S. Border Patrol detention facilities in the Rio Grande Valley and elsewhere. Tragically, some of these children have also become victims of violent crime while traveling across Mexico. Additionally, public health officials are rightly concerned about the spread of disease among the children in the detention facilities and within the communities they are released into. Children from Central America will continue to become victims of violent crime and risk other dangers as long as they continue to traverse Mexico in search of refuge in the United States. The Mexican Cartels are not responsible for the UAC crisis, but they do benefit from smuggling fees and the diversion of Border Patrol resources to address the influx of UAC.

There are many other consequences of an unsecured border with Mexico, which we have provided in previous testimonies. Certainly, the evolution of Mexican drug trafficking organizations into powerful and vicious organized crime cartels, which dominate the U.S. drug and human smuggling market, is a direct result of a porous border. Mexican Cartels traffic marijuana, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine throughout the United States and in Mexico they engage in kidnappings, robberies, human trafficking, extortions and murders for profit. They employ corruption and terrorism tactics and strategies to protect their criminal operations, having killed more than 80,000 people in Mexico, and they pose a serious threat to the domestic security of Mexico.

The consequences of an unsecured border with Mexico also undermine public safety in Texas communities along the border, as evidenced through confirmed cartel-related kidnappings and extortions; public corruption; high-speed, felony vehicle evasions from law enforcement; drug and human stash houses; home invasions; the recruitment of children to support cartel operations as lookouts and mules; pseudo cops; shootings at law enforcement officers patrolling the Rio Grande River; contract killings and dangerous bail outs of undocumented aliens.

Another consequence seldom discussed is the high number of criminal aliens arrested for non-immigration crimes throughout Texas. Since 2008, more than 200,000 criminal aliens who have been charged with over 600,000 state crimes throughout their criminal careers, including over 3,000 homicides and nearly 8,000 sexual assaults. Today, more than 8 percent of all persons booked into Texas jails are criminal aliens, and of that criminal alien total, over 40 percent are recidivists – meaning they have at least one prior criminal arrest in Texas.

It is important that I acknowledge the men and women of the U.S. Border Patrol for their actions in addressing the current situation. They serve on the front line in protecting our state and nation from an array of public safety and homeland security threats, and they face incredible challenges every day.

In a perfect world, the men and women of the Border Patrol operating along the U.S.-Mexico border would already have sufficient resources and staffing levels to successfully secure the border – but they currently do not.

One of the challenges they face is a federal bureaucracy that impedes their ability to perform their mission. Specifically, Border Patrol agents are restricted in the manner in which they can conduct patrols in federal refuge areas contiguous with Mexico, which is exploited by the Mexican Cartels. Texas farmers and ranchers along the Texas/Mexico border provide Border Patrol agents greater access to their personal property than does the federal government.

It is also important to note that local law enforcement agencies including Texas sheriffs' offices and police departments find themselves on the frontlines of keeping their communities, and quite frankly the rest of the nation, safe from international criminal activity. Local law enforcement agencies along the border face unique challenges and the consequences have grave statewide and national consequences. Therefore, the leadership of the state has tasked DPS with supporting Texas border sheriffs and our other law enforcement partners along the border to combat transnational crime.

The Texas Legislature has continued to provide funding to enhance border security, and DPS has dedicated a significant amount of resources, technology, equipment and personnel toward that effort. These resources include state-of-the-art aerial assets, enhanced patrols, advanced monitoring technology, enhanced communication capabilities, increased personnel and overtime. Texas also employs a unified command structure to respond to myriad threats along the border, and has developed contingency plans designed for rapid response and deployment of law enforcement resources.

Texas continues to address the evolving threats and criminal elements operating along our border through efforts including but not limited to:

- **Operation Border Star** – a state-led initiative launched in 2007, which has built on the successes of previous operations with unprecedented local, state and federal law enforcement coordination. Operation Border Star includes 165 agencies, including border sheriff offices and the U.S. Border Patrol. With the assistance and funding from the 80th, 81st, 82nd and 83rd Legislatures, Texas has been able to amplify these efforts each session.
- **Overtime Funds** – Texas local law enforcement agencies on the border have been able to increase their patrol capability with these funds to address transnational crime in their communities.
- **Ranger Reconnaissance (Recon) Teams** – a highly trained tactical team that conducts both overt and extended covert operations in remote areas along the border, aimed at disrupting and deterring criminal activity. *(These teams have the capability to mobilize to different areas based on the locations with the greatest threat)*
- **Operation Drawbridge** – innovative technology systems to monitor remote areas of the border on a 24/7 basis, using low-cost, commercially off-the-shelf technology (wildlife motion-detecting cameras) that have been adapted to meet law enforcement needs. Since January 2012, Operation Drawbridge and its partnership with the U.S. Border Patrol, and Texas border sheriffs and landowners have resulted in the apprehension of more than 37,000 individuals and more than 66 tons of drugs.
- **Tactical Marine Unit** – With funding from the 82nd Texas Legislature and U.S. DHS grants, DPS created a Tactical Marine Unit (TMU) and acquired six 34-foot shallow water interceptor boats to deter those who break state laws and endanger Texans along the Rio Grande River and Intracoastal Waterways. This fleet of patrol vessels represents a significant enhancement to the state’s efforts in combating Mexican drug cartels and in taking back the river from ruthless criminal organizations.
- **Criminal Enterprise Investigations** – DPS agents specialized in organized crime investigations, conduct multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional investigations targeting the command and control cartel and gang networks overseeing drugs, human smuggling and trafficking operations.
- **Border Prosecutors Unit** – A key component of this effort is the Border Prosecutors Unit, which is vital to criminal enterprise investigations and prosecutions and public corruption investigations by dedicating expert prosecutors to these critical efforts.
- **Advanced Aviation Assets** – The Texas Legislature funded state-of-the-art DPS helicopters with FLIR (forward looking infrared radar) and night-vision capabilities that enables DPS to detect smuggling activity, which allows us to support and direct interdictions by ground patrol officers. The Legislature also funded a high-altitude,

fixed-wing aircraft to enable DPS support of law enforcement operations along the border. These border aviation assets are responsible for over 13,000 arrests, \$87 million in drug seizures and the rescue of 137 people.

The Texas Department of Public Safety has been directed by the leadership of Texas to implement our operations plan to conduct surge operations along the Texas/Mexico border. DPS troopers, agents and Texas Rangers from around the state are being deployed to the Rio Grande Valley to conduct data-driven, multi-agency, ground, air and marine saturation patrols in high threat areas for sustained periods of time to deny Mexican Cartels, transnational gangs and criminal aliens unfettered entry into Texas between the Ports of Entry, and in doing so, reduce transnational crime in our communities.

We illustrated the efficacy of this approach during the initial 21-day Operation Strong Safety in the Rio Grande Valley in 2013, and with the funds authorized by the Texas leadership, we have significantly expanded saturation patrols on, along and above the Rio Grande River and we have been directed to sustain the operation until further notice. I can assure you that in my discussions with the honorable members of the Texas State Legislature, they would prefer to spend state funds that they have allocated to border security on other vital priorities, such as education, transportation and public health; however, there is an understanding in Texas that protecting our citizens is a fundamental responsibility of government, and they will do whatever necessary to protect the people of Texas.