

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20500

November 19, 2014

Dear President Obama,

We write as a united coalition joining representatives of border communities and the broader immigrants' rights movement to urge you not to link vitally-needed administrative action protecting immigrants from deportation with further militarization of the borders. Customs and Border Protection is an agency in crisis: **CBP urgently needs a surge in accountability and oversight, not increased Border Patrol personnel or war equipment.** You should not waste more money on the border-industrial complex. Instead, you should commit to best law enforcement practices for CBP, like: agency-wide use of body-worn cameras; robust custody standards; and an end to CBP interior enforcement including checkpoints, roving patrols, and the boarding of public transit to ask for papers far from any border (this occurs daily throughout the 100-mile zone of CBP operations that flout constitutional protections).¹

Adding border enforcement resources as part of your immigration announcement would send a wrong and unjust message to border communities. While enthusiastically welcoming an end to deportation fears among some of our neighbors, friends, and family, border communities cannot tolerate more of the same damaging policies that have vastly over-resourced CBP while failing to invest in accountability. Because of a lack of oversight, CBP personnel frequently abuse people they are sworn to protect and treat humanely, many of whom encounter CBP personnel daily as they go to work, attend school, or run one of life's daily errands.

Irrational, unsupervised growth made CBP the nation's largest police force without building up its integrity and professionalism to match. *Politico Magazine's* recent article, *The Green Monster: How the Border Patrol became America's most out-of-control law enforcement agency*² well describes the root causes and systemic dysfunction at CBP that are responsible for rampant abuses. These include a series of unjustified fatal shootings, staggering levels of corruption, and a culture of impunity for misconduct. In the recent past, CBP has consistently excused and failed to investigate violations which would be unacceptable in a soundly-run law

¹ See "Faith, labor and rights organizations urge President Obama to reform border enforcement policies," linking to August 27, 2014 letter to President Obama available at <http://soboco.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/FinalPOTUSBorderLetterAug2014c.pdf>

² Garrett Graff, *The Green Monster: How the Border Patrol became America's most out-of-control law enforcement agency* (Politico Magazine, Nov/Dec 2014), available at <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/10/border-patrol-the-green-monster-112220.html>

enforcement agency, hampering the agency's mission and staining the reputation of personnel who do their jobs admirably.

To expand border resources – particularly Border Patrol staffing that CBP leadership itself has stated it does not need or want – would badly worsen CBP's serious accountability crisis and compound the damage caused by prior hiring binges. Our organizations have carefully documented abuses that are anything but isolated: for example, at least 31 fatal incidents involving uses-of-force by CBP officers and agents since January 2010,³ and widespread stories of American citizens and other border residents racially profiled, harassed, and brutalized.⁴

We appreciate some promising responsive actions by new Commissioner Kerlikowske designed to address the dire circumstances he inherited. There are encouraging signs that his agenda includes improved transparency and consultation, guided by the highest law enforcement standards. The administration would severely jeopardize this progress, however, if your announcement includes more border agents or war equipment before important reform efforts are implemented to ensure commensurate oversight, accountability and transparency of current CBP personnel and resources. Your announcement cannot overlook the reality of border communities: they are safe, diverse, and economically critical to this country, but they are also forced to endure regular aggression, hostility, and intimidation from a significant percentage of CBP officers and agents. Border residents, like any community, should not have to live with fear and mistrust of law enforcement.

In your announcement, please do not perpetuate the myths of a border-security crisis. Our communities are not one-dimensional examples of frontier lawlessness – quite the opposite, in fact – but they are threatened from within by abusive CBP behavior. This is a crossroads for your administration's border policy: We urge you to cement a legacy of CBP reform that would improve the quality of life and restore trust for this and future generations of border residents. Otherwise, the last six years of dangerous and damaging drift will continue and imprint CBP as a black mark on the administration's human rights and civil liberties record.

Thank you for your consideration of these matters. Please contact Christian Ramirez, Director, Southern Border Communities Coalition, 619.885.1289/christian@alliancesd.org; or Vicki Gaubeca, Director, ACLU of New Mexico Regional Center for Border Rights, 575.527.0664/vgaubeca@aclu-nm.org for further information.

Yours sincerely,

³ Southern Border Communities Coalition, Border Patrol Abuse Since 2010 (Oct. 20, 2014), available at <http://soboco.org/border-patrol-brutality-since-2010/>

⁴ American Civil Liberties Union, "Border Communities Under Siege: Border Patrol Agents Ride Roughshod Over Civil Rights." Available at <https://www.aclu.org/border-communities-under-siege-border-patrol-agents-ride-roughshod-over-civil-rights>

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Alliance San Diego
American Civil Liberties Union
American Friends Service Committee
American Immigration Council
Amnesty International USA
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Asian Law Alliance
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO
Black Alliance for Just Immigration
Border Action Network
California Immigrant Policy Center
Casa de Maryland
Casa de Virginia
Center for Employment Training Immigration and Citizenship Program
Church World Service
Cleveland Jobs with Justice
Coalición Pro Defensa del Migrante A.C.
Comité de Derechos Humanos de Forks
Detention Watch Network
Diocesan Migrant & Refugee Services, Inc of El Paso, Texas
Dream Action Coalition
Employee Rights Center
Enlace
Equality New Mexico
Farmworker Association of Florida, Inc.
Farmworker Justice
Filipino Advocates for Justice
Green Valley/Sahuarita Samaritans
Hispanic Federation
Humane Borders
Immigrant Defense Project
Interfaith Center for Worker Justice of San Diego County
Jobs With Justice
Justice Strategies
Kino Border Initiative
Las Cruces Religious Society of Friends, Quakers
Latin American Working Group

Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities
National Domestic Workers Alliance
National Immigrant Justice Center
National Immigration Forum
National Immigration Law Center
National LGBTQ Task Force
National Network for Arab American Communities
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights
New Mexico Voices for Children
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Pax Christi USA
PICO National Network
Reformed Church of Highland Park, New Jersey
Religious of Assumption
Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network
Sisters of Mercy South Central Community
SOA Watch
South Texas Civil Rights Project
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
Southeast Immigrant Rights Network
Southern Border Communities Coalition
Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition
The Good Shepherd United Church of Christ
United Methodist Women
United We Dream
We Belong Together
Wilco Justice Alliance of Williamson County, Texas
Women's Refugee Commission

cc. The Honorable Jeh Johnson, Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas, DHS Deputy Secretary
The Honorable R. Gil Kerlikowske, Commissioner, U.S. Customs and Border Protection
The Honorable Cecilia Muñoz, Assistant to the President, Director of the Domestic Policy Council
Megan H. Mack, DHS Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

