

ADVISORY BOARD

Hon. John Burton
Hon. Nancy Pelosi

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cynthia Alvarez
Richard Boswell
W. Hardy Callcott
Aidin Castillo
Eva Grove
Tison Gurmu
Bill Ong Hing
Luca D. Mangini
Anita Martinez
Michelle Mercer
Toni Rembe
Rudy Ruano
Guadalupe Sordia-Ortiz
Lisa Spiegel
Alan Tafapolsky
Mawuena Tendar
Hon. James L. Warren (Ret.)
Allen S. Weiner
Roger Wu

GENERAL COUNSEL

Bill Ong Hing

OF COUNSEL

Don Ungar

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Eric Cohen

San Francisco
1458 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Washington, D.C.

600 14th Street, NW
Suite 502
Washington, D.C. 20005

San Antonio
500 Sixth Street
Suite 204
San Antonio, TX 78215

Austin
6633 East Hwy 290
Suite 102
Austin, TX 78723

ilrc@ilrc.org
www.ilrc.org



Written Testimony for Texas Senate Finance Committee
Jennefer Canales-Pelaez, Texas Policy Attorney and Strategist
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)
jcanales-pelaez@ilrc.org

Hearing date: February 9, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

My name is Jennefer Canales-Pelaez and I am a Texas Policy Attorney and Strategist for the Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC) but above all else, I am a Texan. I too, share the same love and passion for The Lone Star State as you. As a Texan, I am deeply concerned with the continuous misuse of funds under Operation Lone Star (OLS).

OLS is a harmful waste of Texas resources for two reasons. 1) OLS is diverting funds for necessary programs that would benefit Texans at large and 2) OLS has led to an increase in frivolous citations and Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) vehicle pursuit deaths which is hurting border communities.

1. Texans are suffering because **billions of dollars** are being diverted from State programs to fund OLS, a racist and unconstitutional scheme.

Governor Abbott’s racist operation continues to cost over 4 billion dollars in taxpayer money while Texans **continue to suffer from a lack of healthcare, education, a reliable power grid, and affordable housing**.¹ Governor Abbot has boldly misused federal COVID-19 dollars and the Texas Department of Public Safety estimates that it spends about \$2.5 million per week for 1,600 troopers involved with OLS.² While Governor Abbott continues to bleed Texans of their resources, we continue to be one of the worst states for affordable housing, lowest in child wellbeing, and an unreliable

¹ Ali Linan, *Texas leaders allot additional \$874.6M for public safety initiatives*, Corsicana Daily Sun, (Oct. 27, 2022) https://www.corsicanadailysun.com/texas/texas-leaders-allot-additional-874-6m-for-public-safety-initiatives/article_482364f5-b7b1-5a13-abc4-99c4f17f3696.html; Governor Abbott Lt. Governor Patrick, Speaker Phelan, Senate Finance House Appropriations Committee Chairs Announce Additional \$874.6 Million For Public Safety Initiatives, (Oct. 27, 2022) <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-lt-governor-patrick-speaker-phan-senate-finance-house-appropriations-committee-chairs-announce-additional-874.6-million-for-public-safety-initiatives>
² Barbara Koeppel, *Exclusive: Texas Governor Greg Abbot Used Covid Aid to Pay for Border Wall*, The Nation, (Oct. 6, 2022) <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/texas-covid-money-operation-lone-star/>; Abby Livingston, *Treasury Department opens investigation into Gov. Greg Abbott’s use of federal funds for border mission*, (May 12, 2022), <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/05/12/texas-border-security-mission-treasury/>; Lomi Kriel and Perla Trevizo, *Texas has spent billions of dollars on border security. But what taxpayers got in return is a mystery*, (April 18, 2022), <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/04/18/texas-border-security-spending/>

power grid to name a few shortcomings.³ Texans do not need more border protection. Texans need more money to fund programs that can benefit our communities. We must not continue misusing taxpayer dollars on unconstitutional and racist political stunts. **Texans deserve better.**

2. Operation Lone Star has led to an increase in militarization, frivolous citations and the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) vehicle pursuit deaths

Residents of border communities have borne the brunt of this unconstitutional scheme as their communities have become increasingly militarized.⁴ Advocates investigating OLS have compiled a wealth of evidence that officers involved in the operation systematically racially profile Latinx drivers in Texas border communities. OLS arrest affidavits demonstrate that officers arrest people based on clear racial stereotypes, or specious assertions, such as that people carrying backpacks must be recent migrants; one officer went so far as to claim he had probable cause because he could “smell” that the person he arrested was undocumented, invoking long standing racist tropes. Nevertheless, the discriminatory arrest practices continue; and Texas continues to jail migrants in abusive conditions in state prisons. Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) troopers have been deployed to border communities as a part of OLS, which has resulted in an increase in pretextual traffic citations that target individuals fitting certain stereotypes associated with migrants, resulting in the loss of civil liberties and freedoms for border residents. Further, civil liberties groups have linked DPS vehicle pursuits to 30 deaths in south Texas⁵. OLS has put once calm and quiet border communities at imminent risk not just from rampant law enforcement, but by

³ Jamil Donith, *National report ranks Texas among worst states for affordable housing, major metro cities also land at the bottom for low-income renters*, (May 5, 2022), <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/news/2022/04/30/the-housing-gap->; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, *2022 Kids Count Data Book: 2022 State Trends in Child Well-being*, (Aug. 8, 2022), <https://www.aecf.org/interactive/databook?l=48>; KVUE ABC, *Report: Texas Power grid still not ready for extreme winter weather*, (Oct. 26, 2022), <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/tx/south-texas-el-paso/news/2022/04/30/the-housing-gap->

⁴ Human Rights Watch, *US: Reject Texas Border Militarization Discriminatory, Dehumanizing Policies Harm Public Safety*, (Nov.17, 2023) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/17/us-reject-texas-border-militarization>

⁵ Tanvi Varma, *Records: Operation Lone Star resulting in increases as high as 1,000% in minor citations for drivers in Starr County*, KRGV.Com, (Aug. 5, 2021), <https://www.krgv.com/news/records-operation-lone-star-resulting-in-increases-as-high-as-1-000-in-minor-citations-for-drivers-in-starr-county/>; Kayle Greenlee Beal, *In Texas, resentment builds as border crackdown ensnares local drivers*, NBC News (Aug. 21, 2022)

Written Testimony for Texas Senate Finance Committee
Jennefer Canales-Pelaez, Texas Policy Attorney and Strategist
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)
jcanales-pelaez@ilrc.org

Hearing date: February 9, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

attracting white nationalist and hopefuls alongside opportunistic vloggers and YouTubers invading these towns for controversy and content.⁶

In conclusion, I urge you to discontinue the funding of a racist, useless, wasteful operation that is doing nothing more than hurting the same people OLS is allegedly trying to protect. Texans. We deserve better.

⁶ Karen Gleason, *North Texas Militia Vows Protection for Kinney County*, The 830 Times, (Oct. 19, 2021), <https://830times.com/news-north-texas-militia-vows-protection-for-kinney-county/>

Written Testimony for Texas Senate Finance Committee
Jennefer Canales-Pelaez, Texas Policy Attorney and Strategist
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)
jcanales-pelaez@ilrc.org

Hearing date: February 9, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.