



Stephen W. Christy
Supervisor, District 4

PIMA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS


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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 27, 2023

TO: Melissa Manriquez
Clerk of the Board

FROM: Steve Christy 
District 4 Supervisor

SUBJECT: Agenda Addendum Item

Please place the following item on the Addendum to the Agenda for the Board of Supervisors meeting of May 2, 2023:

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

**Discussion/Direction/Action regarding Deputy County Administrator & CMO Dr. Francisco Garcia and OEM Director Shane Clark's attendance of the Government Operations and Border Management Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs on April 26, 2023, as well as Dr. Garcia's testimony to the subcommittee that day.
(District 4)**

Thank you.



MEMORANDUM

Date: April 26, 2023

To: The Honorable Chair and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: Jan Leshner 
County Administrator

Re: **Government Operations and Border Management**

Earlier today Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer Dr. Francisco Garcia and Office of Emergency Management Director Shane Clark attended the Government Operations and Border Management Subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs. Dr. Garcia participated on a panel of four individuals including the Mayors of Sierra Vista and Yuma. Attached please find a copy of his testimony. The entire Subcommittee hearing can be accessed through this link.

[Examining the Effects of Increased Migration on Communities Along the Southern Border - Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs \(senate.gov\)](#)

JKL/je

Attachment

c: Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
Francisco García, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer
Steve Holmes, Deputy County Administrator
Shane Clark, Director, Office of Emergency Management

Dr. Francisco Garcia Opening Statement for April 26, 2023 Hearing of the U.S. Senate's Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management

Chair Sinema, Ranking Member Lankford, members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and help provide the Senate and the United States government important information about the effects of U.S. immigration policy on border communities.

The 130 miles of Pima County's border with Mexico is the longest of any county in the country. Since its creation in 1864, Pima County has had a close relationship with the people and government of Mexico. Nearly half the population of Pima County are either recent immigrants from Mexico, or the children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren of Mexican immigrants. Cross border trade and tourism, and the movement of Americans and Mexicans back and forth across the border is a significant part of our culture and heritage.

After the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and changes in economic conditions in Mexico, along with the rise of Mexican drug cartels in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the County's relationship with the U.S.-Mexican border began to change. Efforts to interdict the illegal flow of drugs and immigrants into the United States has had a series of cascading effects on Pima County. I believe all of those effects are well documented and well known to the members of this committee, however the most recent effects of border policy over the past five years have severely stressed the resources of Pima County, the City of Tucson and other incorporated jurisdictions, as well as our region's nongovernmental and interfaith organizations.

On Easter weekend in April, 2019, Catholic Community Services, a social services organization of the Arch Diocese of Tucson, and other members of the local interfaith community, asked the City of Tucson and Pima County for assistance setting up a temporary shelter for people seeking asylum in the United States. The asylum seekers had been released in Tucson by agencies of the Department of Homeland Security. These were people legally in the United States who, under U.S. law, had been granted an opportunity to make their case for asylum at an U.S. Immigration Court elsewhere in the country. There were so many asylum seekers being brought to Tucson that the small shelters CCS and others operated were overwhelmed.

The County and the city agreed. At the time, we thought it was temporary and County involvement would be just for a month or two.

Here we are exactly four years later, and Pima County is still heavily involved in assisting with the sheltering, feeding, medical screening, and transportation of thousands of asylum seekers per month.

Since 2019, Homeland Security has brought to Tucson and released more than 150,000 individuals seeking asylum from dozens of countries. In December, County and community assistance was stressed to the breaking point with 15,000 releases. Homeland Security agencies have signaled that we should expect twice that number per month after May 11th. If that happens, we will be overwhelmed and there will many hundreds of people per day left to fend for themselves on the streets of Pima County.

The question we get asked the most at the County is why Pima County is assisting local charities in this sheltering care and transportation assistance.

Dr. Francisco Garcia Opening Statement for April 26, 2023 Hearing of the U.S. Senate's Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management

Personally, for me, and for many in County leadership, the answer is because it's the right and humane thing to do. But the best answer is because Pima County is a local government charged with providing for the safety, health, and welfare of its citizens and residents. Having thousands of people with limited resources and English skills trying to figure out how to get to other parts of a country that is unfamiliar to them, with no food, little money, no place to sleep, no way to get medical care if they need it is deleterious to the health, safety, and welfare of our County. We are obligated to protect the people of Pima County by assisting these asylum seekers to quickly and efficiently move on to other parts of the country and their sponsoring organizations or families. On average, the vast majority of asylum seekers when assisted, are able to leave the County in 24-36 hours. Without assistance, they would likely linger for days. With scorching summer heat on its way, it is unacceptable to leave these individuals to suffer and struggle on their own in our community.

The net effect of what has been a relatively successful effort to support legal asylum seekers has been the masking of a crisis. Few in Tucson, Pima County or Arizona, know Homeland Security is dropping off hundreds of people a day at a local County-supported shelter. Pima County's role in managing this hidden crisis is mostly logistical and financial. We are the contracting agency securing the shelter spaces and bus and taxi transportation contracts, hiring meal providers, and arranging for medical screenings to ensure people with infectious diseases are treated before boarding buses or planes. And most importantly, we have been the funding agency.

Or rather, you have been. We couldn't do any of this if the federal government wasn't funding these efforts.

County Procurement staff who should be working on contracts with local businesses for services to County residents are spending large amounts of their time securing and managing contracts for asylum care. Staff who should be caring for the County's fleet of vehicles are spending a lot of their time arranging transportation services with cab companies and bus lines. County grants management staff who should be securing funding for County programs and services are spending many hours a week on a constant hunt for federal funding to ensure we can continue to afford the \$1 million a month it costs to provide these sheltering services.

The money is the key to everything. We in Pima County are fully aware that comprehensive immigration reform has been elusive. But Pima County doesn't want to be, nor should it be, in the business of sheltering and caring for people seeking asylum in the United States. That should be a function of the federal government.

If the result of this hearing and the others like is that the Congress will soon take this burden off our hands and stop releasing asylum seekers in our communities, I can assure you that you would get a long and vigorous standing ovation from many, many hundreds of thousands of people in Pima County. But if that's going to remain a bridge too far, then I implore you to, at a minimum, find a better and easier way to fund the local governments who are having this burden placed upon them by their federal government.

Thank you again for your time today and I look forward to answering any of your questions.