

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
7TH DISTRICT OF ARIZONA

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
RANKING MEMBER

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

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The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20006

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

September 15, 2023

Dear President Biden & Secretary Mayorkas,

I write today to share my concern over the lack of coordination and cooperation from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) regarding recent community releases of asylum seekers across Southern Arizona, including in many of the localities that I represent. I commend your ongoing work to unwind inhumane border policies that increased backlogs and ask you to act swiftly to improve the current process.

Throughout the years, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), counties, and cities have been at the forefront of assisting individuals and families after they are vetted and released from DHS custody. These entities ensure that families receive basic necessities, medical care, and assistance with travel arrangements to their final destination while providing them with important information on their immigration court proceedings.

My understanding is that because of a newly released directive from Customs and Border Protection (CBP), individuals are now being released into communities in Arizona, including rural areas, before proper coordination has occurred. Some of these locations lack the infrastructure, such as housing, transportation, medical care etc., and capacity to provide migrants with the support they need. Subjecting migrants, including families, to this expedited process by way of street releases in parts of rural Arizona without the necessary resources, puts intense strain on our communities and is cruel. No migrant family or individual should be forced with the task of navigating a new country without help, many of which are struggling with language barriers. It is inhumane and against our values.

The federal government's coordination efforts with local communities have fallen short and must be improved. The DHS preparedness plan calls for "improved coordination and information sharing with NGOs, states, cities, and other stakeholders." I urgently request that CBP and your Administration proactively engage and coordinate with these entities to prevent individuals and families from being released in areas without resources and logistics in place. I ask that you quickly assess current federal coordination efforts and provide a more detailed plan to improve the process for our nation.

In addition, asylum seekers should be permitted to apply to obtain work authorization from the moment that they file their asylum claim. Easing the undue delays in granting work authorizations will help states, cities, localities, looking to welcome asylum seekers while they contribute to economic growth.

Lastly, I request that funding from the newly formed Shelter and Services Program be distributed in a transparent, equitable and accessible manner so that borderlands NGOs and local governments that have been assisting migrants are able to continue their vital work. It's critical that we surge federal funding for these entities that support asylum seekers, including funding and transportation, as soon as possible to assist these communities with capacity issues.

I hope you share the urgency of this matter and work in good faith with local entities to ensure the supported release of individuals and families.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress