



Media Statement

Dec. 1, 2023

California Welcoming Taskforce Statement Re: County of San Diego Funding to Assist Asylum Seekers

The County of San Diego Board of Supervisors has declared multiple times that there is an urgent humanitarian need in the region to assist people seeking asylum at our southern border, but more collaboration, funding and accountability is required to meet this need.

It Takes All of Us

All levels of government must step up to support this moment. **No person seeking safety from violence and persecution should be left on the streets of San Diego, detained between border walls and in the high desert without food, water or shelter, remain in the local airport for days, or any other condition that is not rooted in a dignified and respectful welcome.**

As a coalition of organizations that work on both sides of the border, [The California Welcoming Task Force](#) appreciates the step forward made by the County of San Diego to allocate \$3 million of federal funding to support efforts to provide temporary assistance for people seeking asylum that have been left at transit centers and other locations throughout the San Diego region without any resources.

Release an RFP for Future Funding

However, as a coalition rooted in welcoming asylum seekers with dignity and compassion, we have grave concerns about the services currently being provided through this funding. **With the additional request for \$3 million more scheduled for a vote on Dec. 5, we implore the County Board of Supervisors to implement additional transparency and reporting requirements to ensure funding leverages resources, partnerships and efficiencies with the region's robust network of experienced humanitarian aid providers and existing respite shelters, as well as maximizes existing budget appropriations (including at the federal, state and local levels).**

Open Air Detention Sites

We strongly advocate that a portion of this new funding be allocated to provide urgent humanitarian aid at the U.S. Custom and Border Protection's "open-air detention sites." People seeking asylum continue to be held in abhorrent and inhumane conditions between border fences without any shelter from the elements or basic resources, such as food, water, adequate sanitary facilities, or medical care. **The County of San Diego has yet to acknowledge the existence of these sites and their conditions**

there and must do so. After a recent visit to San Diego, the Women’s Refugee Commission [released a report](#) substantiating the need for the County of San Diego and the current subcontractor to improve investment and coordination to streamline the movement of migrants from the border to safety.

Many of the organizations within the Task Force have been part of the critical efforts to assist migrants left at transit stations and other locations by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as well as providing assistance at the “open-air detention sites” – all without assistance from government at any level.

Civil society has stepped up; now all levels of government must, too.

Haitian Bridge Alliance

"As the leading Black-led and immigrant-led organization across the US-Mexico border that provides humanitarian services, legal services, and leads advocacy at the United Nations and Washington DC to advance racial equity for people of African descent, the Haitian Bridge Alliance centers the lived experiences of directly impacted communities and was one of the first responders to the situation in San Diego. With over 50% of arrivals being of African descent, our diverse staff has been providing culturally competent services to ensure that the response is rooted in equity and racial justice. It is imperative that our approach and response to this emergency be a collective one to ensure proper services to the people we are supporting. We ask the county to intervene to ensure all future funding takes racial equity into account, centers accountability and ensures that those who are best positioned to serve the community can continue the work they have been doing without funding. We strongly believe that together, the community-based organizations and the County can strengthen the ability to serve those who are most vulnerable. As we say in Haitian Kreyol, many hands lighten the load." said **Guerline Jozef, Founder and Executive Director of the Haitian Bridge Alliance, Co-Founder of the Cameroon Advocacy Network, and Co-Founder of the Black Immigrants Bail Fund.**

Al Otro Lado

"Al Otro Lado has provided legal and humanitarian assistance to refugees on the San Diego-Mexico border for years," said **Erika Pinheiro, Executive Director of Al Otro Lado.** "We currently participate in several established immigrant rights coalitions addressing the needs of migrants trapped in open-air detention sites throughout the County, as well as provide assistance to the over 900 families that have been separated during Border Patrol processing in San Diego County since September. Additionally, Al Otro Lado is providing critical support to migrants who are sent to hospitals from the open-air detention sites, who are currently being discharged as ‘homeless’ to the streets of San Diego, often without any means to contact their families. Our support is critical to ensure that migrants do not die, become homeless, or remain permanently separated from their family members as they seek safety at the California border, but our work is unsustainable without additional investments from all levels of government. Failing to allocate County dollars toward strengthening the systems we have built collectively to assist the most vulnerable puts lives at risk."

Immigrant Defenders Law Center

“With the County’s investment of \$3 million, and now with a potential additional allocation, San Diego has the opportunity to take a critical step forward and add vital capacity to the existing human-centered welcoming infrastructure that NGOs, grassroots organizations and advocates in our region have created through our collective efforts,” said **Lindsay Toczyłowski, Executive Director of Immigrant Defenders Law Center.**

“Thus far, however, the County has failed to ensure that funds are used to strengthen existing infrastructure and has allowed for reckless spending that has resulted in a depletion of funds in just two short months. ImmDef, at our own expense, has continued to provide legal services, family reunification and assistance to vulnerable populations at the Central drop-off site seven days a week, often 12-plus hours a day. We continue to do this because protecting the rights of asylum seekers is a mission critical to us as an organization, and this is the same reason why we demand accountability for these funds. As a region, we must do better. Lives depend on it.”

Jewish Family Service of San Diego

“As operators of the SDRRN Migrant Shelter Services, Jewish Family Service of San Diego continues to provide respite shelter to approximately 1,000 people seeking asylum released to our care by DHS every day. Since the recent street releases began, we’ve continued our work by supporting groups on the ground to assist with reunifying separated families, coordinate shelter for vulnerable populations released to the streets, and provide vital support to medically fragile individuals released from local hospitals in need of respite shelter. We continue to stand at the ready to work in partnership with the County of San Diego and its contractors to support the critical humanitarian needs that must be urgently addressed in our region,” said **Kate Clark, Esq., senior director of immigration services, Jewish Family Service of San Diego.** “The collective expertise and infrastructure that has been built in our region by NGOs, grassroots organizations, and advocates must be considered and integrated to efficiently and compassionately welcome people seeking asylum.”

American Friends Service Committee

“For nearly 90 days, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) with community partners have provided humanitarian aid to people seeking asylum along the border at an open-air detention site in South San Diego, where the Border Patrol forces migrants to wait for hours or days. The organizations and volunteers have received no County resources to support migrants enduring these extreme conditions. There has been no formal acknowledgement by County representatives that migrants should be treated with dignity and respect. AFSC staff and partners have provided food, water, and have treated medically vulnerable people, including children, needing emergency extraction. If County representatives want to truly tout themselves as having a long history of welcoming new arrivals to the region, they must support migrants in San Diego County who are being held in violation of national standards at Border Patrol’s open-air detention sites and allocate funding from the \$3 million to prioritize people held in inhumane

conditions. Already, two migrants have died crossing into the United States near an open-air detention site in San Diego,” said **Pedro Rios, director of the American Friends Service Committee’s US-Mexico Border Program.**

International Rescue Committee

“Asylum-seekers can be welcomed in a safe, orderly, and dignified manner, with appropriate coordination and resources between government and nonprofits. Now is the moment for local government to support the efforts of community leaders and nonprofit organizations who have provided essential services and humanitarian reception for new arrivals for decades. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has provided humanitarian assistance and case management support on the ground as well as financial resources to partners leading the response from day one. We join our partner agencies in calling for a transparent process to allocate County funding to sustain essential humanitarian reception infrastructure in San Diego,” said **María Silva, IRC Technical Advisor, Cross Border and Asylum.**

The California Welcoming Task Force is a binational coalition dedicated to re-envisioning how the U.S. can welcome people seeking asylum safely and expeditiously at our border by coordinating across sectors (humanitarian and health, legal, advocacy and communications). More info. at www.rapidresponsesd.org/cawtf.

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