



**STATEMENT OF ANTHONY M. REARDON
NATIONAL PRESIDENT
NATIONAL TREASURY EMPLOYEES UNION**

**IMPROVING SECURITY, TRADE, AND TRAVEL AT
SOUTHWEST BORDER PORTS OF ENTRY**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
AND BORDER MANAGEMENT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

June 16, 2021

Chairwoman Sinema, Ranking Member Lankford, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. As National President of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU), I have the honor of leading a union that represents over 29,000 Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO) employees, including CBP Officers, Agriculture Specialists and trade enforcement personnel stationed at the 328 air, sea, and land ports of entry across the United States (U.S.) and 16 Preclearance stations at airports in Ireland, the Caribbean, Canada, and the United Arab Emirates.

CBP OFO employees are responsible for border security, including anti-terrorism, immigration, anti-smuggling, trade compliance, and agriculture protection at U.S. ports of entry. CBP's OFO pursues a dual mission of safeguarding American ports by protecting the public from dangerous people and materials, while enhancing the nation's global and economic competitiveness by enabling legitimate trade and travel. In addition to CBP's trade and travel security, processing, and facilitation missions, CBP OFO employees at the ports of entry are the second largest source of revenue collection for the U.S. government. **In 2020, CBP processed more than \$2.4 trillion in total import value of goods and collected approximately \$74 billion in customs duties and fees.**

As with every workplace, the COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the most significant ongoing challenges facing CBP employees at the ports of entry. The pursuit of the safest possible working environment for CBP employees at all ports of entry, trade, enterprise services and operations support facilities has been NTEU's paramount concern during the COVID-19 crisis. Throughout the pandemic, many international air, sea, and land ports of entry remained open and staffed by CBP OFO employees 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year.

Despite best efforts to protect essential frontline CBP employees, **over 8,800 CBP employees have tested positive for COVID-19 and tragically 31 CBP employees have died as a result of the virus.** I want to take a moment to honor the NTEU CBP members by name: CBPO Genaro Guerrero-San Ysidro, CBPO Crispin San Jose-Cross Border Xpress, CBP Technician Van Dong-

Los Angeles International Airport, CBPO Alfonso Murrieta-Tucson International Airport, CBPO Richard McCoy-Fort Lauderdale/Port Everglades Port of Entry, CBPO Richard Rios-Area Port of Ysleta Commercial Facility, CBPO Troy Adkins-Port of El Paso, Rodolfo Morales, Jr.-Port of El Paso, CBPO Jose Santana-Laredo Port of Entry, CBPO Roel De La Fuente-Port of Hidalgo, CBPO Domingo Jasso-Progreso Port of Entry, CBPO Carlos Mendoza-Pharr Cargo Facility, CBP Agriculture Specialist Juan Ollervidez-Hidalgo Port of Entry, CBP Field Technology Officer James Taylor-JFK International Airport, CBPO Omar Palmer-JFK International Airport, CBPO Ching Kok (C.K.) Yan-JFK International Airport, CBPO Andrew Bouchard-Houston Seaport, CBPO Cesar Sibonga-Kenneth G. Ward Port of Entry, and CBPO Lucas Saucedo-Eagle Pass Port of Entry.

I am happy to report that since the vaccine became available to essential federal employees, NTEU has worked with CBP to encourage and assist our members in getting the vaccine. According to our most recent briefing from DHS, 77 percent of employees who opted-in have received at least the first vaccine dose. We all understand federal workers' anxiety about their own and their family's safety during this pandemic as they work to keep our country safe. As leaders, it is important that we continue to do everything we can to mitigate the risks they face, and we need to encourage them to do so on an individual basis, for their own safety as well as the safety of their coworkers and families.

Along with ensuring protection from the pandemic, the most important resource that Congress needs to provide to improve security, trade, and travel at all the ports of entry, including those at the southwest border, is funding to address ongoing OFO staffing shortages at the ports.

CBP Staffing at the Ports of Entry: For years, NTEU has advocated for the hiring of thousands of new CBP Officers and hundreds of new Agriculture Specialists and non-uniformed trade operations personnel that are needed based on the agency's own Workload Staffing Model (WSM), Agriculture Resource Allocation Model (AgRAM) and Resource Optimization Model for Trade Revenue (Trade ROM).

Pursuant to these models, the final FY 2020 funding agreement provided \$104 million to fund the hiring of 800 new OFO positions, including 610 CBP Officer and CBP Agriculture Specialist new hires. Unfortunately, Congress did not continue to fund to the models in FY 2021. While House Appropriators approved \$171 million for 1,150 new CBP OFO positions including \$91 million for 850 CBP Officers, \$10 million for 100 support personnel and \$30 million for 200 agriculture specialists, the final FY 2021 funding agreement did not include any funding to increase staffing for CBP OFO.

CBP's staffing models are dynamic and reflect the impact of the pandemic on CBP OFO staffing needs. Despite the decrease in international trade and travel in the past year due to the pandemic, CBP's most recent staffing models show a staffing gap of 1,700 CBP Officers, 400 Agriculture Specialists and 200 non-uniformed Trade Specialists. However, there has been no additional funding for demonstrably needed OFO new hires since FY 2020.

To address the OFO staffing gap, NTEU has requested that House and Senate Appropriators include in its FY 2022 DHS appropriations bill funding for CBP OFO new hires

up to levels required by the CBP's dynamic workplace staffing models for CBP Officers, Agriculture Specialists and Trade Specialists. NTEU is asking Appropriators to provide at minimum \$160 million in direct appropriated funding for CBP "Operations and Support" in FY 2022 to fund the hiring of at least 800 CBP Officers, 240 CBP Agriculture Specialists, 200 CBP Agriculture Technicians, 20 Agriculture Canine Teams and 50 non-uniformed trade enforcement specialists and associated operational support personnel.

To further support this staffing request, NTEU joined a coalition of 28 port stakeholders, including Airports Council International-North America, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the U.S. Travel Association on a letter dated May 4, 2021, to the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee urging funding for new officers so the agency will be prepared for an influx of passengers and cargo at the ports-of-entry once the current international travel restrictions are relaxed and eventually lifted. (See appendix A.)

As the letter states, ensuring CBP staffing is an economic driver for the U.S. economy and an additional 800 CBP Officers would not only reduce wait times at ports of entry, but also provide new economic opportunities across the United States. "While the volume of commerce crossing our borders has more than tripled in the past 25 years, CBP staffing has not kept pace with demand" the coalition wrote. "Long wait times at our ports-of-entry lead to travel delays and uncertainty, which can increase supply-chain costs and cause passengers to miss their connections. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, border delays result in losses to output, wages, jobs, and tax revenue due to decreases in spending by companies, suppliers, and consumers."

Furthermore, acknowledging the ongoing CBP Officer staffing shortage at the ports, CBP again finds it necessary to solicit CBP Officers for temporary duty assignment (TDY) to San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, and Calexico land ports of entry, which began on May 16, 2021. According to CBP, the TDY is necessary to support the workload and operational challenges facing the San Diego Field Office, such as wait times in excess of four hours. OFO anticipates the TDY to run in three, 62-day phases and tentatively ending on July 18, 2021, with the possibility of additional phases. These TDYs will be filled by CBP Officers currently assigned to air and seaport locations and will generally exclude northern and southern land border POEs.

Lastly, in order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, since March 2020, travel through the northern and southwest border land ports has been restricted to essential trade and travel. These restrictions are reevaluated monthly and there is an expectation that these essential travel restrictions will be lifted as early as June 21. If these essential travel restrictions are indeed lifted, I have heard from NTEU leaders that the current staffing at land ports will be unable to maintain inspection and processing functions to address the expected increase in traffic flow in a timely manner. At the San Ysidro port of entry, the current TDYs will need to be extended or wait times at that port will become untenable. With the end of essential travel restrictions, the surge of travelers, as well as asylum seekers, through the land ports threaten to overwhelm port functions. To end the need for TDYs, it is up to Congress to address the ongoing port staffing deficit by authorizing and funding CBP OFO new hires in FY 2022 and subsequent years until the staffing gap identified in the workload staffing models are met. Without addressing the ongoing CBP Officer staffing shortages, allocating adequate staffing at all ports will remain a challenge.

Unfortunately, the FY 2022 President's DHS budget request is essentially flat and includes no increase in funding for CBP OFO new hires. NTEU greatly appreciates the President for including a pay raise for federal employees in his budget proposal and new CBP funding to address the annualization of the FY 2021 pay raise, the FY 2022 pay raise, the associated FERS contribution and funding for certain port modernization projects.

NTEU commends Senator Gary Peters (D-MI), now Chairman of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, for introducing and getting favorably reported out of this Committee in 2020, S. 1004, the Safeguarding American Ports Act, stand-alone legislation that would authorize the hiring of 600 additional CBP Officers annually until the staffing gaps in CBP's WSM is met. NTEU strongly support the reintroduction of this stand-alone CBP Officer staffing authorization bill. NTEU recognizes that the Subcommittee Chair recently introduced S. 1358, the Bipartisan Borders Solutions Act, a bill that includes a provision similar to CBP Officer hiring authorization provision to the Peters' standalone bill. While NTEU supports the CBP Officer staffing provision in S. 1358, NTEU has no position on the remainder of the bill and will continue to encourage the introduction and support passage of a stand-alone CBP Officer staffing bill.

CBP Agriculture Specialist Staffing: Currently, there is a shortage of approximately 430 Agriculture Specialists nationwide according to CBP's own data-driven and vetted Workload Staffing Model. Last year, Congress approved P.L. 116-122, the *Protecting America's Food and Agriculture Act of 2019*. The new law authorizes CBP to hire 240 CBP Agriculture Specialists, 200 CBP Agriculture Technicians and 20 Agriculture Canine Teams per year until the staffing shortage that threatens the U.S. agriculture sector is met. NTEU's appropriations request includes funding to hire the first wave of CBP agriculture inspection personnel authorized by the newly enacted statute.

CBP Trade Operations Staffing: In addition to safeguarding our nation's borders and ports, CBP is tasked with regulating and facilitating international trade. **CBP employees at the ports of entry are critical for protecting our nation's economic growth and security and are the second largest source of revenue collection for the U.S. government--\$74 billion in 2020. For every dollar invested in CBP trade personnel, \$87 is returned to the U.S. economy,** either through lowering the costs of trade, ensuring a level playing field for domestic industry or protecting innovative intellectual property. Since CBP was established in March 2003, however, there has been no increase in non-uniformed CBP trade enforcement and compliance personnel. Additionally, CBP trade operations staffing has fallen below the statutory floor set forth in the Homeland Security Act of 2002 and stipulated in the FY 2019 CBP Trade ROM. To maintain CBP's trade enforcement mission, NTEU requests that Congress provide funding in FY 2022 for 50 additional CBP non-uniformed trade personnel.

User Fee Shortfalls: One of the most critical pandemic related issues facing CBP OFO is the reduction of user fee funding that is threatening the nation's economic recovery as international trade and travel struggles to return to normal. This budget shortfall is a result of the reduction in customs and immigration user fees collected due to the drastic drop in international commercial travel, and to a lesser extent, trade volume since March 2020.

As you know, CBP collects fees under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA) and immigration inspection user fees to recover certain costs incurred for processing air and sea passengers and various private and commercial land, sea, air, and rail carriers and shipments. The source of these user fees are commercial vessels, commercial vehicles, rail cars, private aircraft, private vessels, air passengers, sea passengers, cruise vessel passengers, dutiable mail, customs brokers, and barge/bulk carriers. International air travel contributes 94 percent of COBRA and immigration user fees. COBRA and immigration user fees together fund 40 percent of CBP's OFO budget, including 8,000 CBPO positions. That is roughly one third of the entire CBP workforce at the ports of entry. Agriculture Quality Inspection (AQI) user fees currently fund up to 2,400 Agriculture Specialists, currently 100 percent of the CBP Agriculture Specialists workforce.

Due to the pandemic's continued disruption of fee-generating international travel and commerce, user fee collections have fallen precipitously which has necessitated the need for emergency funding to prevent furloughing CBP OFO personnel at a time when international trade and travel volume is beginning to return to pre-pandemic levels. To address the user fee shortfall, we were pleased that Congress provided \$840 million in FY 2021 emergency appropriations to maintain current staffing of CBP Officers. Projected CBP trade and travel volume data shows an estimated user fee shortfall of up to \$1.4 billion through the first quarter of FY 2022. Congress also provided up to \$635 million through the end of FY 2022 in supplemental funding to USDA to cover the user funding shortfall that funds CBP Agriculture Specialists staffing.

U.S. businesses rely on the safe and efficient movement of goods and people across our borders and are all working to safely resume international travel and travel. Keeping current CBP Officer staffing levels will be necessary to successfully transition into a more robust, safe, and delay-free travel environment and improve cargo movement. Losing the hiring and staffing advances that they finally started to gain after years of effort and much appreciated funding support by Congress will negatively impact cross-border travel, passenger processing and trade facilitation in future years as the economy returns to normal.

The critical issues that American businesses are facing to recover from this pandemic require quick, decisive action so that our government can best facilitate the flow of travel and trade as the economy recovers. Without Congress again providing supplemental funding or reprogramming existing funds to support these CBP Officers between now and the end of FY 2022, we are gravely concerned that this loss of user fee funding will result in furloughs at a time when this workforce is most needed to facilitate the flow of legitimate travel and trade as the economy recovers.

NTEU requests that the Committee seek from appropriators, either through reprogramming, a supplemental funding bill, or in its FY 2022 DHS appropriations bill, funding to replace user fee shortfalls for CBP OFO salaries and expenses and to mitigate dependence on user fees to fund salaries and expenses of CBP OFO personnel. This CBP OFO funding request will help to ensure that current CBP Officer staffing levels are maintained as trade and traffic volumes increase. NTEU implores you to seek additional funding now so that CBP Officers can stay on the job during the economic recovery. CBP employees at the ports of entry already face many challenges in the course of their work and concerns about their health and safety or of being furloughed as the country reopens for business should not be among them.

NTEU also strongly opposes any diversion of COBRA user fees. Any increases to the user fee account should be properly used for much-needed CBP staffing and not diverted to unrelated projects. In 2015, the *Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act* indexed COBRA user fees to inflation. However, the Act diverted this increase in the user fee from CBP to pay for unrelated infrastructure projects. Indexing the COBRA user fee to inflation is projected to raise \$1.4 billion over ten years—a potential \$140 million per year funding stream to help pay for the hiring of additional CBP Officers to perform CBP's border security, law enforcement and trade and travel facilitation missions. Diverting these funds has resulted in CBP not receiving this user fee funding to hire over 900 new CBP Officers per year since the FAST Act went into effect. These new hires would have significantly alleviated the current CBP Officer staffing shortage.

CBP Officer Overtime: Prior to the pandemic, ongoing staffing shortages resulted in CBP Officers being required to work excessive overtime hours to maintain basic port staffing. CBP Officer overtime pay is entirely funded through user fees and is statutorily capped at \$45,000 per year. All CBP Officers are aware that overtime assignments are an aspect of their jobs. However, long periods of overtime hours can severely disrupt an officer's family life, morale and ultimately their job performance protecting our nation. CBP Officers can be required to regularly work overtime hours and many individual Officers have hit the overtime cap very early in the fiscal year. This leaves no overtime funding available for peak season travel, resulting in critical staffing shortages in the third and fourth quarter that coincides with holiday travel at the ports.

To address this issue prior to the pandemic CBP granted overtime cap exemptions to over one-half of the workforce to allow managers to assign overtime to Officers that have already reached the statutory overtime cap, but cap waivers only force CBP Officers already working long daily shifts to continue working these shifts for more days. As the trade and travel volume recovers, CBP Officers may once again be required to come in hours before their regular shifts, to stay an indeterminate number of hours after their shifts (on the same day) and compelled to come in for more overtime hours on their regular days off. Involuntary overtime resulting in 12 to 16-hour shifts, day after day, for months on end significantly disrupts CBP Officers' family life and erodes morale. As NTEU has repeatedly stated, extensive overtime is not a long-term solution for staffing shortages at the ports and we need Congress' support to end this practice by funding OFO new hires as international trade and travel volume continues to rally.

Reimbursable Service Agreements: In order to find alternative sources of funding to address serious staffing shortages, CBP received authorization for and has entered into Reimbursable Service Agreements (RSAs) with the private sector, as well as with state and local governmental entities. These stakeholders, who are already paying COBRA and immigration user fees for CBP OFO employee positions and overtime, reimburse CBP for additional inspection services, including overtime pay and the hiring of new CBP Officer and Agriculture Specialist personnel that in the past have been paid for entirely by user fees or appropriated funding. Since the program began in 2013, CBP has entered into agreements with over 211 stakeholders providing more than 793,000 additional processing hours for incoming commercial and cargo traffic (see GAO-20-255R).

NTEU believes that the RSA program is a band-aid approach and cannot replace the need

for Congress to either appropriate new funding or authorize an increase in customs and immigration user fees to adequately address CBP staffing needs at the ports. RSAs simply cannot replace the need for an increase in CBP appropriated or user fee funding—and they make CBP a “pay to play” agency. NTEU also remains concerned with CBP’s new Preclearance expansion program that also relies heavily on “pay to play.” Further, NTEU believes that the use of RSAs to fund CBP staffing shortages raises significant equity issues between larger and/or wealthier ports and smaller ports.

Opioid Interdiction: CBP OFO is the premier DHS component tasked with stemming the nation’s opioid epidemic — a crisis that continues to get worse. On a typical day, the agency makes over 900 arrests and seizes more than 9,000 pounds of illegal drugs.

According to a May 2018 report released by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Minority titled *Combating the Opioid Epidemic: Intercepting Illicit Opioids at Ports of Entry*, “between 2013 and 2017, approximately 25,405 pounds, or 88% of all opioids seized by CBP, were seized at ports of entry. The amount of fentanyl seized at the ports of entry increased by 159% from 459 pounds in 2016 to 1,189 pounds in 2017.”

CBP officials recently testified that seizures of fentanyl at the ports of entry “increased from 2,579 pounds in FY 2019 to 3,967 pounds in FY 2020, an increase of 54 percent. For the comparative time frame of FY 2020 and 2021 (October to March for both years) the amounts seized were 1,079 and 5,048. This is over a 300 percent increase with a half year to go.”

Most fentanyl is manufactured in other countries such as China and is smuggled primarily through the ports of entry along the southwest border and through international mail and Private Express Carrier Facilities, such as FedEx and UPS. Over the past five years, CBP has seen nearly 50 percent increase in express consignment shipments from 76 million to 110 million express bills and a 200 percent increase in international mail shipments from approximately 150 million to more than 500 million.

Prior to the enactment of FY 2019 funding agreement, there were only 181 CBP employees assigned to the five Postal Service International Service Centers and 208 CBP employees assigned to the Private Express Carrier Facilities. Additional funding from Congress for CBP OFO new hires in the past two cycles has increased the number of CBP Officers assigned to these inspection facilities. NTEU’s FY 2022 funding request would allow for further increases in CBP port staffing at these facilities.

Ongoing Morale Issues at DHS: Adequate staffing at CBP ports of entry is critical to our nation’s economic vitality. In order to attract talented applicants, however, federal agencies must also recognize the importance of employee engagement and fair treatment in their workplace. Unfortunately, low morale has been a consistent challenge at CBP that is reflected in CBP’s ranking in the Partnership for Public Service (PPS) *Best Places to Work in the Federal Government*. In 2019, PPS ranked CBP as 380th out of 420 component agencies surveyed with a drop of 2.1% from 51.6% in 2018 to 49.5% in 2019.

The *Best Places to Work* results raise serious questions about the CBP’s ability to recruit and retain the top-notch personnel necessary to accomplish the critical missions that keep our country

safe. If the agency's goal is to build a workforce that feels both valued and respected, these results show that the agency needs to make major changes in its treatment of employees.

Of particular concern to NTEU is the increase in suicides as the reported cause death of Federal employees. Last year, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released data that shows that Federal employee suicides were at their highest level in at least 15 years, with suicides accounting for 28% of the 124 Federal employee job-related deaths in 2018. Since 2011, the number of self-inflicted intentional fatalities among Federal workers has more than doubled to 35, although the Federal workforce has remained approximately the same size.

Most suicides continue to involve Federal employees in work related to law enforcement, such as CBP. In 2016, 15 of the 16 reported suicides were by Federal workers employed at a national security related agency. At CBP, more than 100 employees died by suicide between 2007 and 2018, according to the agency. NTEU applauds CBP for seeking additional funding for their Employee Assistance Program (EAP). We also appreciate that CBP agreed to add NTEU representatives to a CBP workgroup that is working to address the unacceptably high rate of suicides among CBP personnel and develop a Suicide Prevention Strategy. It is vital that this workgroup continue to include input from rank-and-file members as it develops a strategy to reduce the number of job-related suicides at CBP.

Recognizing these disturbing statistics, NTEU applauds the President for including in FY 2022 budget request an increase of \$2.1 million to fund on-site clinicians to support CBP employee resiliency and suicide prevention programs.

NTEU also strongly supports H.R. 490, the DHS Morale, Recognition, Learning and Engagement Act or the DHS MORALE Act. The MORALE Act was approved by the House on April 20, 2021, and is awaiting action by the Senate. The bill directs the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) to analyze government-wide Federal workforce satisfaction surveys to inform efforts to improve morale, maintain a catalogue of available employee development opportunities and authorize the designation of a Chief Learning and Engagement Officer to assist the CHCO on employee development.

H.R. 490 also authorizes the establishment of an Employee Engagement Steering Committee comprised of representatives from across the Department, as well as individuals from employee labor organizations that represent DHS employees. Lastly, the bill authorizes the Secretary to establish an annual employee awards program to recognize non-supervisory DHS employees who have made a significant contribution to the Department. In our collective bargaining agreement with CBP, NTEU negotiated an extremely popular employee joint awards program. The Agency retains the discretion to determine how much of its budget will be allocated for awards, but 85 percent of the total awards budgeted are recommended by a joint union/management awards committee to be distributed proportionately among bargaining unit employees. NTEU recommends that DHS look at the negotiated CBP joint awards program as a model for an agency-wide program.

While a major factor contributing to low morale at CBP is insufficient staffing and resources at the ports of entry, the provisions in the DHS MORALE Act will help to address non-staffing issues that affect employee morale by improving frontline employee engagement

and establishing a statutory annual employee award program. NTEU commends the House for approving the DHS MORALE Act and urges the Senate to expeditiously do the same.

NTEU Recommendations: To address CBP's workforce challenges and to improve security, trade, and travel at the Southwest border ports of entry, Congress must first address CBP OFO ongoing staffing shortages. It is clearly in the nation's economic and security interest for Congress to authorize and fund an increase in the number of CBP Officers, CBP Agriculture Specialists, and other CBP employees at the air, sea, and land ports of entry.

In order to achieve the long-term goal of securing the proper staffing at CBP OFO and end disruptive TDYs and excessive involuntary overtime shifts at the Southwest border ports of entry, NTEU recommends that Congress take the following actions:

- Enact a stand-alone bill to authorize funding for CBP Officer new hires to the level identified in the workload staffing model,
- Support funding for CBP Officers new hires in FY 2022 DHS Appropriations,
- Support FY 2022 funding for new CBP agriculture inspection personnel, as authorized by P.L. 116-122,
- Support funding for needed Trade Operations Specialists and other OFO support staff,
- Support the introduction and passage of the DHS MORALE Act by the Senate, and
- Oppose any legislation to divert customs user fees to other uses, projects, or programs that are collected to fund a portion of salaries, benefits, and overtime for CBP Officers.

The CBP employees that NTEU represents work hard and care deeply about their jobs and their country. These men and women are deserving of more staffing and resources to perform their jobs better and more efficiently.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee.

NTEU Exhibit A

May 4, 2021

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Chair
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murphy and Ranking Member Capito:

As stakeholders interested in the facilitation activities of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at air, land, and sea ports-of-entry around the world, we are all greatly affected by the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic and its impact on the processing of passengers and cargo.

With CBP experiencing a precipitous drop in user fees during the COVID-19 pandemic, we greatly appreciate Congress providing supplemental resources last year to help the agency maintain its staffing levels and continue to onboard new officers. We understand the user-fee shortfalls will continue into Fiscal Year 2022 and additional funding likely will be necessary to assist CBP through this difficult period.

We also urge the subcommittee to provide funding for new officers so the agency will be prepared for an influx of passengers and cargo at the ports-of-entry once the current international travel restrictions are relaxed and eventually lifted. Even during the global pandemic, CBP's most recent workload staffing model shows a shortage of over 1,700 officers that are needed to keep up with current travel and trade demands at our ports-of-entry. Providing CBP with at least 800 additional CBP officers as international passenger and cargo volumes rebound would reduce lengthy wait times at the ports-of-entry and facilitate new economic opportunities in communities throughout the United States.

Increasing CBP officer staffing is an economic driver for the U.S. economy. While the volume of commerce crossing our borders has more than tripled in the past 25 years, CBP staffing has not kept pace with demand. Long wait times at our ports-of-entry lead to travel delays and uncertainty, which can increase supply-chain costs and cause passengers to miss their connections. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, border delays result in losses to output, wages, jobs, and tax revenue due to decreases in spending by companies, suppliers, and consumers. The travel industry estimates long CBP wait times have discouraged international visitors, who spend an average of \$4,200 per visit, from traveling to the United States.

We share your commitment to ensuring that America's borders remain safe, secure, and efficient for all users, while enhancing our global competitiveness through the facilitation of legitimate travel and trade. We greatly appreciate your efforts to continue building on staffing advances made in recent years, and we urge you to include funding in your bill this year to sustain the current CBP officers and hire new ones.

Sincerely,

Airports Council International – North America
National Treasury Employees Union
American Association of Airport Executives
American Association of Port Authorities
Airforwarders Association
American Society of Travel Advisors
Arizona-Mexico Commission
Border Trade Alliance
Cargo Airline Association
City of Douglas, Arizona
City of San Luis, Arizona
Douglas Industrial Development Authority
Douglas International Port Authority
Douglas Regional Economic Development Corporation
Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association
Fresh Produce Association of the Americas
Global Business Travel Association
Greater Nogales Santa Cruz County Port Authority
Greater Yuma Port Authority
National Association of Waterfront Employers
Nogales Customs House Brokers Association
Nogales Economic Development Foundation
Nogales Community Development
Southwest Port Users Association (San Luis, Arizona)
Texas International Produce Association
US Chamber of Commerce
US Travel Association
West Gulf Maritime Association