

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery by Chair Kyrsten Sinema
Government Operations and Border Management Subcommittee Hearing: The Non-Governmental Organization Perspective on the Southwest Border

April 28, 2021

Welcome to the first hearing of the Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management for the 117th Congress.

I'm pleased to Chair this subcommittee and to partner with Ranking Member Lankford, just as we did in the 116th Congress. I look forward to working with him, the Chair and Ranking Member of the full Committee, and the rest of my Senate colleagues to address a wide array of critical issues.

Our subcommittee has an expanded jurisdiction this Congress. We will continue to examine important topics such as federal regulatory policy and a more efficient federal workforce, and I expect we will also look at how to improve the U.S. Postal Service and the decennial Census.

We will also focus significant time on a critical topic for my state of Arizona, and the entire nation – improving how we manage and secure our border.

I grew up in southern Arizona, so like a lot of Arizonans, I've seen firsthand how Arizona, and specifically small communities along the border, pays the price for the federal government's failure over decades to fix our broken immigration system.

As Chair of this Subcommittee, I will work to ensure Congress and the administration take meaningful steps to secure the border, support our border communities and NGOs, prevent the spread of COVID-19, and treat all migrants and unaccompanied children fairly and humanely.

Right now, our nation confronts a crisis at our Southwest Border. Since the beginning of 2021, we have seen an unprecedented surge of migrants arrive at border. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has reported 351,803 migrant encounters in just the first three months of 2021, compared to 107,732 during the same period in 2020.

This influx of migrants puts severe strain on both the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The men and women staffing those departments have worked tirelessly to help migrants while also securing the border, facilitating trade and protecting our communities.

But there are many others also working day and night to help migrants and respond to the ongoing crisis. I am pleased we have several of those individuals joining us today as witnesses.

Non-Governmental Organizations (N-G-Os) play a critically important role managing the ongoing influx. Their efforts to provide migrants with basic assistance – including food, shelter and travel aid – is a key link in the ongoing effort to ensure migrants are treated fairly and our communities can successfully manage this crisis.

Without these NGOs, Arizona, our border states, our nation and the migrants themselves would be worse off.

That's why I worked with my colleagues to include \$110 million in funding in the last COVID package to provide NGOs and border communities with additional resources to assist migrants and protect our communities.

I look forward to hearing directly from International Rescue Committee and Annunciation House about how Congress and the Administration can improve its efforts to communicate and coordinate with NGOs. It is critical that Congress hear directly from NGOs about the challenges they face so we can craft solutions that make sense for everyone impacted by this crisis.

It's also critical that we always consider the security challenges of the ongoing influx. I look forward to hearing about actions Congress and the Administration can take right now to better secure our border and protect our communities from the threats posed by Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs).

Last week, I introduced bipartisan legislation with Sen. Cornyn in response to the ongoing crisis. The Bipartisan Border Solutions Act takes a number of important steps to respond to this influx by improving DHS processing capacity, improving legal assistance to migrants and ensuring DHS better coordinates and communicates with NGOs and local governments.

Our bipartisan bill represents a first step toward dealing with some of the challenges we see at the border. It does not tackle every challenge. I look forward to working with my colleagues, the Administration and outside stakeholders, including the NGOs represented today on our panel, to improve our proposal.

Thank you all for joining us today. I look forward to the testimony and the discussion.