The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

At your State of the Union address, you falsely claimed that El Paso, Texas “used to have extremely high rates of violent crime — one of the highest in the entire country,” and said we were once one of the country’s “most dangerous cities.” Further, while you acknowledge that El Paso is one of the safest communities in the country, you falsely claim that this happened only after a wall was built (2008-2009). This is erroneous, the fact is that from 1993 to 2007, the violent crime rate in El Paso dropped 62 percent, and from 2005-2007, El Paso consistently held the third lowest violent crime rate among 35 U.S. cities with a population over 500,000.

The FBI’s Uniform Crime Reporting Program, which I have attached, discounts your claims. I have also attached newspaper articles that document this further. El Paso has never been one of the most “dangerous cities” in the country, and our safety and security has long been a point of pride. These distortions about our vibrant community are harmful to our reputation and degrade our spirit.

Yesterday, we learned that you intend to visit El Paso next week. I urge you to treat this visit as your opportunity not only to correct the record and ensure that the misinformation you stated on the national stage is retracted, but also an opportunity to apologize to El Pasoans for the disparagement of our community.

While you are visiting the safe and vibrant border community I call home and have the honor to represent in Congress, I invite you to tour the community and hear from local stakeholders.

- First, you must visit the location where Felipe Alonzo Gomez was apprehended. As you know, Felipe, the young boy who fled Central America with his father and died in U.S. custody, was apprehended in the El Paso sector where fencing already exists. If you visit that part of the wall, you will see that a wall does not stop asylum seekers. In fact, the wall is several feet away from the actual U.S./Mexico boundary line and when asylum-seekers turn themselves into Border Patrol agents, they are already on U.S. soil. Your proposed wall will not change that and they have a right to claim asylum once on U.S. soil.
• Next, I suggest you visit our ports of entry. The visit would demonstrate how vital they are to the American economy and show you that investments in infrastructure and modern technology, not a wall, will allow Customs agents to do their jobs swiftly and with more accuracy. I am happy to help arrange a sit down with local business and trade groups from El Paso to brief you on the infrastructure needs of our border community and the ports of entry. They will tell you that your proposed $5.7 billion dollars for a down payment on a wall would better be spent improving our ports of entry. As a former businessman, I would hope you could appreciate that investment in infrastructure leads to better commerce.

• In addition to your visits with federal law enforcement, you should meet with human rights and legal advocates who work with these same migrant populations. A visit to our local non-profit Annunciation House would allow you to see the collaboration that exists between the federal government and our NGOs on the ground who provide respite to families on their way to meet sponsors. While there, you should speak with asylum seekers who have traveled thousands of miles fleeing violence and poverty in search of refuge, only to be denied lawful entry at our ports. Hearing their stories will allow you to see the human toll your harmful policies and practices have on families.

• Finally, I recommend you visit the El Paso Processing Center where at least 9 detainees who have been on a hunger strike have had a tube forced down their nose to be force-fed in what many of us believe is tantamount to torture.

If you arrive in El Paso early enough, my office stands ready to facilitate any or all of these visits. The people of El Paso stand ready to provide the information necessary for you to get the facts, understand the truth, and correct the record.

Sincerely,

Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress
El Paso's Violent Crime Rate Compared to Cities 500,000 to 1,000,000

Wall completed in 2008
Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Data
Study ranks El Paso 3rd-safest large city

A private research and publishing company ranked El Paso the third-safest city with a population of more than 800,000 in 2000.

El Paso ranked 95th safest altogether but third safest after Honolulu and San Jose, Calif., among cities with populations of a half million or more.

Morgan Quitno of Lawrence, Kan., studied the crime rate of 322 cities that reported murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary and auto theft statistics to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The safest city overall was Amherst, N.Y., population 10,918. Morgan Quitno found, and the most dangerous city was Detroit, population 975,020.

For more information: www.morganquitno.com

— Louie Gilot
El Paso named nation’s 2nd-safest large city

By Daniel Borunda  
El Paso Times

El Paso improved its ranking to become the second safest city in the United States in the 100 most dangerous cities rankings by Morgan Quintero, a Kansas City search and publishing firm.

The city, which had been ranked 25th in 2002, moved up to 23rd in 2003. El Paso had been ranked the third safest city since 1997.

Mayor Joe Wardlow said the city is proud of its efforts to reduce crime.

"We're making progress," Wardlow said. "We're doing things to make our city safer."