

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2025

President Donald Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW,
Washington DC 20500

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear President Trump and Secretary Hegseth,

We write to you with urgent concerns about and staunch objection to plans to use our nation's military installations as migrant detention centers. As you know, the mission of the Department of Defense (DoD) is to protect and defend our nation against military threats, not to conduct migrant detention, immigration enforcement, or deportation operations.

It is unfortunate that it has become necessary to remind the administration that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for enforcing immigration laws at and between ports of entry, as well as securing our nation's borders. Further, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is responsible for interior enforcement, detention, and removal operations.

Reports¹ have outlined the Department of Homeland Security's Request for Assistance (RFA) submitted to the DoD for resources to support ICE operations, to include migrant detention on military installations and migrant transfers. Further, we understand DHS has requested DoD provide support on a non-reimbursable basis – blatantly forsaking the intent behind Congressionally directed defense funds for the sake of little else but political theater. These reports also indicate Fort Bliss, in El Paso, Texas, is expected to become a testbed for the administration's reckless misuse of our military installations, personnel, and funds for migrant detention purposes. Even more disturbing is that your administration's stated plans for Fort Bliss are intended to provide a framework for expansion at six named military installations, with potential expansion to include military facilities in at least five other states.

Dramatically expanded use of U.S. military personnel and facilities to support mass detention operations, both domestically and overseas at Guantánamo Bay, has already diverted, and will

¹ [Trump Plans to Use Military Sites Across the Country to Detain Undocumented Immigrants - The New York Times](#)

continue to divert, military personnel and resources from the DoD's core warfighting mission, the very same one you claimed to want to restore in your capacity as Secretary of Defense. This administration has already demonstrated unprecedented use of military assets for some of the operational responsibilities of the Department of Homeland Security, to include the designation of military airlift for the purposes of conducting migrant deportation flights². Such actions are an incredible misuse of defense funds when usual ICE procedures for deportation purposes employ charter planes at a small fraction of the costs associated with operating a C-17 or C-130 military aircraft, as your administration has directed. Most glaringly, your administration has not sought to provide justification as to why such military assets and the costs accrued were considered necessary or fiscally sound.

Similarly, commandeering military funds and assets to support detention operations on military bases imposes a ludicrous mandate on our military personnel and installations. The administration has yet to issue even a passable justification for the misuse of DoD personnel, assets, or funds, further conflating the separate missions of DHS and DoD. In the past, DHS has awarded contracts to state, local, and even private entities to supplement its detention capacity. This administration has given no indication that it intends to forego these often lucrative contracts with partner entities, making the administration's insistence on plans to misuse military installations for migrant detention purposes even more irresponsible.

To note precedent, domestic military installations like Fort Bliss have been used to temporarily house refugees in instances of military evacuations – most notably, Operation Allies Welcome in the wake of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, that effort, though directly linked to a military operation, was not without costs; that mission alone significantly degraded readiness levels of the installation, resulting in a readiness shortfall of approximately two years. Further, our military installations have also been used to host an Emergency Intake Site (EIS) for unaccompanied migrant minors. In response to an influx of unaccompanied minors who arrived at the southwest border in early 2021, the Department of Health and Human Services set up temporary housing on Fort Bliss out of concerns for their safety.

Current circumstances mirror none of those precedents, as border crossings have been steadily dropping for a year, and migrant encounters by U.S. Customs and Border Patrol are at their lowest level in decades.³ Additionally, the only existing hardened facilities on Fort Bliss that could possibly be used for migrant detention currently house members of the New Mexico National Guard. Should such facilities be used, this administration would oversee the displacement of our service members to support migrant detention.

As your administration prepares its presentation of the Fiscal Year 2026 federal budget, you maintain authority to request increased funds across the Department of Homeland Security for these purposes and with respect to the jurisdiction of federal agencies. Instead, converting our military installations into migrant detention facilities drains DoD funds and resources in a manner that flies in the face of your administration's stated goal of reducing federal spending while tanking military readiness and risking our national security. Plans for mass detention efforts, with few realistic goals to measure success, on a U.S. military installation risks costing DoD hundreds of millions of unbudgeted dollars — if not billions — and thousands of man-

² [First military deportation flights from US take off for Guantanamo as sailors help Marines prep for incoming migrants | Stars and Stripes](#)

³ <https://www.axios.com/2025/03/04/illegal-border-crossings-february-decline-trump>

hours which cannot be regained. It will also severely strain the limited infrastructure on our installations that our service members depend on, and we strongly urge you to cease this misuse of DoD funds and personnel immediately.

We urge the Department of Defense and, where appropriate, the Department of Homeland Security to supply answers to the following no later than 30 days after receipt.

1. Has an assessment been conducted to outline the deployment of active-duty troops, military airlift, other military assets, and the use of our military installations for DHS purposes as necessary- as opposed to utilizing DHS alternatives? If so, please provide the results of that assessment.
2. Which funding accounts has DoD utilized to facilitate support operations as requested by DHS to date, and what is the total cost to date of DoD funds expended for these purposes?
3. How will DoD monitor the overall impacts of supporting DHS's RFA – to include man-hours, expended funds, delayed or canceled training activities, and impacts to military infrastructure?
4. Have or will any military construction or other programmed projects be paused, delayed, or canceled as a result of the diversion of resources to DHS operations at our military installations?
5. What steps will DoD take to ensure that Congress is kept apprised of readiness shortfalls for each installation used to support migrant detention operations?
6. Which military units, if any, may be tasked with providing labor, manning, or other logistical or operational support for the standing up of these migrant detention centers?
7. Should the construction, manning, and all other logistical or operational support of these detention centers be conducted by private contracting entities, please outline the oversight and transparency mechanisms your administration intends to put in place to ensure the safety and security of migrants as well as any contracted personnel.

Sincerely,



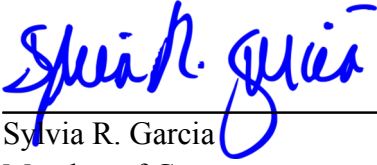
Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



Jason Crow
Member of Congress



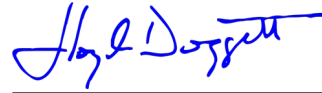
John Garamendi
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



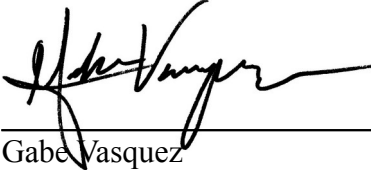
Herbert C. Conaway, Jr.
Member of Congress



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress



Gabe Vasquez
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Marilyn Strickland
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Cc The Honorable Kristi Noem
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U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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