



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

NORA VARGAS
First District

JOEL ANDERSON
Second District

TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Third District

VACANT
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: September 26, 2023

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT:

DECLARING THE LACK OF RESOURCES FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Starting September 13, 2023, migrants have been released to transit stations across the region, including two stations in San Diego, a station in Oceanside and a station in El Cajon. The Federal government has not provided adequate resources to manage asylum seeking migrants, presenting a strain on local resources in the San Diego region. These street releases are continuing daily, with no set end date. The County of San Diego is faced with an urgent humanitarian crisis that needs to be addressed. Migrants are being released across the county with little direction and few resources. Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have shown initiative and taken leadership to respond need additional resources.

This item is urgent and timely due to the influx street releases throughout the County of San Diego beginning September 13, 2023 and continuing at least twice daily. On September 20th, 2023 the Board of Supervisors received a letter on behalf of the San Diego Immigrant Rights Consortium, a coalition of approximately 50 community, faith, labor and legal organizations across San Diego County. The County cannot and should not provide these resources as this responsibility falls squarely with the Federal government. Due to the urgent nature of the needs, this item cannot be placed on a future agenda.

Multiple NGOs have elevated their needs as they continue to step in to help during this humanitarian crisis. On September 20, 2023 the Board of Supervisors received a letter (Attachment A) from a coalition of community and faith-based organizations requesting resources to assist asylum seekers being “street-released”, dropped at transit stations across the region with no resources except what they carry with them. The letter states, “Individuals are dropped at the MTS stations with no resources other than what they arrived with and need assistance navigating their way to their final destination. Numerous non-profit organizations, faith organizations, community groups and other partners have stepped up to assist and have provided food, water, shelter, and assistance securing transportation as they are able.”

San Diego County needs further federal assistance. Our country’s immigration system requires comprehensive immigration reform and adequate resources deployed to border

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communities. The Federal Government must step up and provide resources to address this urgent humanitarian crisis.

NGOs on the ground need support to manage basic needs and transportation for asylum seekers to safely be reunited with their family members at their end destination. Additional federal resources will help our region prioritize the dignity and safety of asylum seekers.

Today's action proposes to declare an urgent humanitarian crisis and to prompt additional action and resources from the Federal Governments to either limit the number of asylum seekers released into the region or to provide the resources for Non-Government Partners to adequately manage them through to their destinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAIRWOMAN NORA VARGAS AND SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND

1. Declare the lack of resources for asylum seekers from the Federal government a humanitarian crisis.
2. Take the following positions as a Board:
 - A. The release of asylum seekers beyond the capacity of the Federal Government or NGOs to handle in a safe and humane manner should be discontinued.
 - B. Oppose lateral transfers from other states and jurisdictions.
3. Send a letter detailing the specific needs of local non-governmental organizations and impacted communities to San Diego's Federal delegation to request additional resources.
4. Advocate for federal funding to help our region develop a long-term solution that includes a permanent facility and operational support when federal agencies release asylum seekers in our region.
5. Per the February 7, 2023 Board Action, direct the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs to continue convening with the 18 incorporated cities, state, federal governments, and non-governmental organizations to further collaborate and develop a comprehensive, innovative regionwide approach to address short-term and long-term goals for our permanent border community, including cross-system solutions, and clear lines of responsibility and partnership;
6. Direct the CAO to pursue federal funding to address the above recommendations.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

All San Diego residents deserve the opportunity to live in a dignified manner in communities that provide them a safe and supportive environment. The County and its partner organizations can assist in this effort by helping asylum seekers arriving in our region with respite shelter,

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assistance needed to expedite travel to their final destination, and other basic necessities. By seeking additional Federal funding and support, the County can ensure we better support our partners and impacted communities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

By requesting additional support and resources from the Federal government we can ensure our region has the necessary resources to continually assist this population and prevent additional homelessness in San Diego County.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Starting September 13, 2023, migrants have been released to transit stations across the region, including two stations in San Diego, a station in Oceanside and a station in El Cajon. The Federal government has not provided adequate resources to manage asylum seeking migrants, presenting a strain on local resources in the San Diego region, creating an urgent humanitarian crisis that needs to be addressed. These street releases are continuing daily, with no set end date. Migrants are being released across the county with little direction and few resources. Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have shown initiative and taken leadership to respond need additional resources. Multiple NGOs have elevated their needs as they continue to step in to help during this humanitarian crisis.

On September 20, 2023 the Board of Supervisors received a letter (Attachment A) from a coalition of community and faith-based organizations requesting resources to assist asylum seekers being “street-released”, dropped at transit stations across the region with no resources except what they carry with them. The letter states, “Individuals are dropped at the MTS stations with no resources other than what they arrived with and need assistance navigating their way to their final destination. Numerous non-profit organizations, faith organizations, community groups and other partners have stepped up to assist and have provided food, water, shelter, and assistance securing transportation as they are able.”

San Diego County needs further federal assistance. Our country’s immigration system requires comprehensive immigration reform and adequate resources deployed to border communities. The Federal Government must step up and provide resources to address this urgent humanitarian crisis.

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Title 42, a Covid-19 pandemic era emergency health order enacted in March 2020, was lifted May 11th, 2023. It permitted stricter conditions for asylum, allowing Border Patrol turn away migrants on the grounds of preventing the spread of Covid-19. Under this policy, people who crossed the border illegally lost their right to claim asylum. They would then be deported. Those who were eligible to be processed by Border Patrol and file a petition for asylum were then released back into Mexico to wait for a court date. This was known as the “Remain in Mexico” policy. The policy expired on May 11th, 2023, as the public health emergency for Covid-19 expired. Immigration policy then reverted back to Title 8, the default immigration law.

Under Title 42, immigration was severely limited to prevent the spread of Covid-19. However, there were still large influxes of migrants seeking to enter the country. In December 2022, there were several days of street releases by Border Patrol in San Diego County. Nearly 1,000 migrants were dropped off at transit centers with no direction or resources. While some continued their journey to family or sponsors, many were stranded with nowhere to sleep. These migrants faced inclement weather, short term lodging and difficulties obtaining food. Migrant shelters were overrun, and the federal government chose to drop people off at transit centers rather than seeing the problem through to the end.

On February 7, 2023, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors took several actions to address the region’s need for additional resources. Those recommendations included (1) jointly advocating for federal funding and resources, including application for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) and (2) convene with the 18 incorporated cities, state, federal governments, and non-governmental organizations to further collaborate and develop a comprehensive, innovative regionwide approach to address short-term and long-term goals for our permanent border community, including cross-system solutions, and clear lines of responsibility and partnership. As a result of those recommendations, the County of San Diego also sent a letter to the Congressional delegation urging them to prioritize comprehensive immigration reform during the current legislative session and prohibiting the practice of lateral transfers.

Regardless of whether Title 42 or Title 8 was the policy in place, border influxes overwhelmed Customs and Border Patrol. This led to surges of asylum seekers being released into the streets across the Southwestern United States. NGO’s who help migrants have quickly reached capacity in their effort to step in and support the federal government.

For the past two years, and as part of COVID-19 response, the State of California spent more than \$1 Billion to provide four shelters in the region to process asylum seeking migrants, scan for and address health concerns and communicable diseases, provide basic food and clothing, and coordinate transportation to the migrants’ ultimate destination across the Country. The State has now returned to operations pre COVID.

NGOs on the ground need support to manage basic needs and transportation for asylum seekers to safely be reunited with their family members at their end destination. Additional federal resources will help our region prioritize the dignity and safety of asylum seekers.

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Ongoing lateral transfers from jurisdictions outside of California further burden the capacity of NGOs and local governments. Additionally, the federal government must continue to monitor infectious disease outbreak control. We are concerned about the report of increasing infectious disease outbreaks in migrant shelters in Baja California. Increases in diseases such as COVID-19, influenza, and varicella (chickenpox) require enhanced medical responses and isolation capacity at our local shelters. Recently, varicella cases in the migrant population resulted in several exposures in unvaccinated individuals, including pregnant women. As the winter respiratory season approaches, the respiratory disease burden is expected to increase. The issue of infectious disease outbreak control has been highlighted across the entire US Mexico border and Federal assistance in addressing this is greatly appreciated.

Today’s action proposes to declare a humanitarian crisis and to prompt additional action and resources from the Federal Governments to either limit the number of asylum seekers released into the region or to provide the resources for Non-Government Partners to adequately manage them through to their destinations.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

All San Diego residents deserve the opportunity to live in a dignified manner in communities that provide them a safe and supportive environment. The County and its partner organizations can assist in this effort by helping asylum seekers arriving in our region with respite shelter, assistance needed to expedite travel to their final destination, and other basic necessities. By seeking additional Federal funding and support, the County can ensure we better support our partners and impacted communities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

By requesting additional support and resources from the Federal government we can ensure our region has the necessary resources to continually assist this population and prevent additional homelessness in San Diego County.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

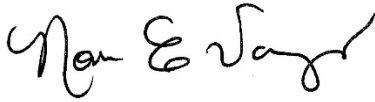
N/A

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today’s proposed action supports the Community (Safety, Quality of Life) Strategic Initiative in the County of San Diego’s 2023-2028 Strategic Plan by helping to ensure safe communities that improve the quality of life for all residents.

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Respectfully submitted,



NORA VARGAS
Supervisor, First District



JIM DESMOND
Supervisor, Fifth District

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - SDIRC BOS letter