



Yuma County Sheriff's Office

Leon N. Wilmot
Sheriff of Yuma County

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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 18, 2021 – 3:00 PM

Response to Planned Release of Illegal Immigrants

Location of Incident: Yuma, AZ

Yuma County Sheriff Leon Wilmot has issued the following statement in response to the attached letter dated February 17, 2021 received from Congressman Paul Gosar:

I received a letter from Congressman Paul Gosar regarding the planned release of illegal border crossers into our local community. In his letter, Congressman Gosar requests that I *“intercept these aliens and hold them in prison until they can be tested, quarantined, and then returned to their home countries.”*

As the Sheriff of Yuma County, I am tasked with enforcing state law and keeping the peace in our community. These are duties that I have undertaken for over 36 years in Yuma County. However, as Sheriff, I do not have the statutory authority to honor Congressman Gosar's request to intercept aliens released into the community by the Federal government who has given them documents giving them permission to be in this country.

As a border Sheriff, I work with and communicate with our Federal partners at Border Patrol and Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) on nearly a daily basis. I also work with my counterparts in the Southwestern Border Sheriffs' Coalition, the Western States Sheriffs' Association, and the National Sheriffs' Association to formulate good policy on all matters related to law enforcement. One of those matters is often border security and the impact illegal immigration has on our local communities. We often communicate with the Federal policymakers and seek to make our positions heard. It is frustrating when those policymakers make decisions and enact policies that impact our communities without first having communicated with us at the local level. I and my counterparts in the above mentioned groups remain committed to being the voice of our communities and to advocating for a cooperative relationship with our Federal partners when it comes to matters of public safety. As such, on February 17, 2021, a group of Sheriffs came up with the topics listed below related to the President's anticipated Migrant Protection Protocols to bring 25,000 asylum seekers into the United States, as well as our concerns related to illegal border crossers being released into society due to COVID-19 restrictions placed on our Federal partners who do not have the ability to house all those apprehended along the southwestern border. The below concerns were presented to DHS leadership on February 17, 2021 and we await their response.



Releasing people with no accurate COVID-19 testing or tracking into the United States during a pandemic. There is no scientific or medical rationale behind this decision.

- Title 42 is being disregarded (legal challenges on 42 violations).
- Where are the tests; vaccination certificates; spread health risks into the interior? Are non-U.S. Citizens getting vaccines?

- Human rights violation to communities: Resource shortages in states are not part of the consideration. DHS is not considering that communities are at a breaking point. The lack of consultation with local communities will put families and children at enhanced risk of shortfalls of social services.

Message from Sheriffs: It is not credible that DHS leadership is properly prepared to undertake this effort and local communities will bear the brunt of the consequences.

DHS leadership promised transparency and cooperation with local communities, but now is exposing communities to a major health crisis into those communities and potentially to migrants themselves once they are released.

- DHS leadership has NOT been transparent to communities and health departments across the country which could cause a new potential burden on the hospital system with no method of payment. How will they fix this?
- DHS leadership has no guidance for local communities on infrastructure to support swollen community numbers already hit with a global pandemic.
- DHS leadership is not accepting responsibility or taking ownership over those released into society. We all know the asylum system is hopelessly broken with a multi-year case backlog.
- Local hospitals will be tasked to address medical care when COVID-19 inevitably is spread further. Who is paying for this increased medical care?
- CBP is not congressionally appropriated for transportation of detainees once processed. Will this be addressed?
- Will CBP just release all family units coming across and move processing to a "later date" when they arrive at their final destination?
- How is CBP screening for human trafficking, sex assault victims and potential gang affiliates?
- Is this the new precedent for how the unavoidable rush of thousands more migrants will be handled in the ensuing months?

Message from Sheriffs: This is in effect going to be an unfunded fiscal drain on local communities including law enforcement who do not have the resources to absorb the results of this decision and the effects of this new precedent.

As your Sheriff, I remain committed to my duties and responsibilities. I will continue to enforce state law and provide for public safety. I do share concerns about the lack of planning or consideration of the public impact the change in policy leading to the release of these individuals into our communities will bring. I am pleased to learn from our local Federal partners at ICE and Border Patrol that they are working diligently to screen these individuals to protect us from potential criminals. I am also glad to know that they are at least being medically screened prior to release and anyone who is identified as a potential health risk is taken in for medical treatment. However, I remain alarmed at the potential this new policy has to quickly overwhelm our community resources with illegal aliens not being rapid tested for COVID-19 prior to release and then utilizing public transportation across the United States to their final destinations, as well as the ancillary impact to our citizens due to services being consumed by these individuals.

Sheriffs across our nation have been consistent in our message to the past and current administrations that homeland security, border security and public health/humanitarian issues are first and foremost the priority for all government and we are united in working together to accomplish what is best for our communities.

Information Released By: Lt. Samuel Pavlak

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
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February 17, 2021

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Sheriff Leon N. Wilmot
Yuma County Sheriff's Office
141 S. 3rd Avenue
Yuma, AZ 85364

The Honorable Doug Ducey
Governor, State of Arizona
State Capitol, 1700 West Washington
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Re: Emergency Law Enforcement Interdiction

Dear Sheriff Wilmot and Governor Ducey:

I have been informed by Yuma County Supervisor Jonathan Lines of the concerns raised by the City of Yuma, as well as San Luis and Somerton, pertaining to the imminent release of illegal aliens into Yuma County. There is no adequate plan to screen or quarantine aliens for COVID-19, perform background checks, and there is a long track record of these aliens being convicted criminals.

The Border Patrol, in an abrupt reversal of policy, has declared its intention to release 50 illegal aliens every day into Yuma County. Where these illegal aliens go after their "release" is anyone's guess. Phoenix. Tucson. Prescott. San Diego. These are super-spreader events that will go off daily. If we are to take seriously the State and the County's efforts to rein in the pandemic, then releasing 50 potentially positive cases every day into Arizona is a threat to public health and constitutes an emergency.

I am asking that Sheriff Wilmot intercept these aliens and hold them in prison until they can be tested, quarantined, and then returned to their home countries. The general population of Arizona should not be subjected to this mass event that will spread infected aliens throughout the state. It is beyond reckless for the Border Patrol to take this action. As of the time of this writing, Yuma County has suffered 36,127 cases and 758 deaths. This is not the time to release super spreaders into Yuma County. There should never be a time for this.

In addition to arrest, detention, and quarantine by Sheriff Wilmot, the State should consider using FEMA money to offset the costs for the apprehension and treatment of these illegal aliens. As a member of Congress, I have voted for trillions of dollars in COVID-19 relief. This money is intended to prevent the transmission of the virus and having the Border Patrol release hordes of infected aliens into our country is reckless and contrary to every law and protocol in place. I will use my best efforts to get additional funding into Arizona to address these matters.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress