

Dear Members of Congress,

We write to you as communities of faith to ask you to oppose any efforts to build a wall or other barrier across our southern border. Though we come from different faith traditions, we are united across theological lines by principles of compassion, stewardship, solidarity, and justice. Our unique traditions call us to value the dignity and worth of every person and to protect creation. A border wall and other forms of senseless border militarization are inconsistent with these values. A border wall is not only an irresponsible use of public funds, but also hurts people and the environment, interferes with the sovereignty of indigenous communities along the border, harms businesses and communities in the border region, involves the confiscation of private land, and further militarizes a region that has already seen an erosion of civil rights.

The January 27, 2017 Executive Order, *Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements*, and the Department of Homeland Security's subsequent implementation memo propose to expand the current border wall and further militarize the border region. We see these proposals as counterproductive efforts that directly conflict with the faith principles we hold dear.

Walls do not deter migration. The construction of border walls and increased enforcement tactics focus on the symptoms rather than the causes of migration. Rather than deter migration, the current 650-miles of barrier along the southern border has pushed vulnerable migrants – sometimes at the direction of traffickers – into more dangerous and sometimes fatal routes. This further complicates a complex situation rather than increasing security. As long as poverty, lack of opportunity and violent conflict push people to come to the U.S.—and, as long as opportunities, safety, and family members pull people here—there will be migration. When the legal routes are either not available or severely restricted, as they are in the U.S., people will seek safety and family reunification whatever way they can. And no wall will stop them.

Walls are an ineffective and immoral use of public funds. At an estimated initial construction cost of over \$21 billion, a border wall represents irresponsible and wasteful government spending. To date, taxpayers have already paid more than \$2.4 billion for approximately 650 miles of border fencing- and many millions more have been spent on maintenance. This will only increase with further construction. Such public funds should not be wasted on a border wall, but instead dedicated to education, health care, housing, and other basic human needs programs, in addition to addressing root causes in the countries from which people are migrating.

Walls hurt communities, businesses and landowners in the border region. Over the past twenty years, the federal government has dramatically militarized the U.S.-Mexico border region, infringing on the civil rights of border residents, and sowing distrust and fear between communities and law enforcement entities. Gone largely unchecked, these operations have stifled the economic vitality and overall wellbeing of U.S. border communities. Much of the land along the Texas border is in private hands, meaning the government will need to seize this land through eminent domain, leading to lengthy court battles and the loss of private property for hundreds of land owners, including ranchers and farmers.

Walls increase risk of flooding and cause other environmental harms. Dozens of laws that protect the environment, public health, and sacred lands were waived to build existing fencing and walls. We should not sacrifice clean air, clean water, and decades of investments in our public lands for dubious promises of increased security, particularly not when our border security agencies and border communities tell us such drastic measures are not necessary. These proposals, using heated rhetoric over border security, will undermine longstanding human health and environmental protections. Nearly one-third of U.S. land along the border lies in public hands, including national wildlife refuges, national parks, and national forests. Fencing and walls, while doing little to stop human migration, are effectively severing wildlife migration routes and destroying thousands of acres of natural habitat. Physical barriers have also resulted in extensive flooding and soil erosion. Further construction of fencing and walls along the border will only serve to exacerbate the destruction of God's creation.

Walls infringe on the rights of indigenous border communities. A border wall would further divide historic tribal lands and communities; prevent tribal members from making traditional crossings for domestic, ceremonial, and religious purposes; and disturb or even destroy tribal archeological, sacred sites, and human remains. Any border security measures – including patrols and checkpoints– affecting or accessing tribal lands must involve meaningful consultation, collaboration, and direct participation by all affected tribes.

Our faith communities have ministries and relationships deeply rooted in border communities. We have witnessed how current border enforcement policies have torn families and communities apart, contributed to the deaths of thousands of migrants, harmed wildlife and border ecosystems, and violated the rights and humanity of U.S. citizens and immigrants alike. As communities of faith, we believe that government spending should reflect our values and advance the common good. Funding for further border militarization falls far short of these values. Therefore, we ask you to stand against any funding for a border wall and further militarized infrastructure and instead to reorient the Department of Homeland Security's strategies toward more sensible and humane solutions that benefit and are informed by border communities.

Sincerely,