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August 1, 2023

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20016

Dear Secretary Mayorkas:

I write to express my grave concerns with the allocation and administration of funding for the Shelter and Services Program (SSP). The program as currently run could have catastrophic impacts on Arizona's border communities.

In June 2023 I wrote directly to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to express my disagreement with shifting funding away from border communities and towards interior states during the transition from the Emergency Food and Shelter Program-Humanitarian (EFSP-H) to SSP. As I stated in that letter, "this funding shift has resulted in a much larger share being allocated to non-border states, leaving cities, counties, and non-profits in Arizona short on the resources they need to both adequately respond to border crossings and continue to provide services to residents."

After continued conversations with entities in Arizona whose funding has been altered under the new allocation, it is clear Arizona's communities face potentially dire funding cliffs. A few of the most concerning reports are:

- \$8,364,948 allocated to Pima County will be spent down in **less than 2 months**
- \$11,093,294 allocated to Yuma County will be spent down in **less than 8 months**.
- \$4,282,153 allocated to all of Maricopa County will be spent down in **only 2 to 4 months**, depending on the services provided.

These alarming figures exist on top of other flaws in the SSP formula, including arbitrary caps on categories like transportation and non-congregate shelter. This is compounded by an apparent misunderstanding of the funding needs for different regions of border states, such as the designation of Phoenix/Maricopa County as an interior area rather than a major transportation hub from which migrants frequently travel to their final destinations. As you and other high-ranking officials have seen for yourselves in visits to the state, the regional approach known as the "Arizona model" has been uniquely effective, and made Arizona the only border state with zero street releases last year. These new funding decisions threaten the ability to maintain the Arizona model.

In addition, the process for creating the new SSP program skipped key steps in transparency and consultation with groups on the ground. The previous EFSP-H program had been implemented and improved upon over multiple years in close collaboration with border communities and non-profits. Now, those same entities have been frozen out under SSP, putting at risk years of valuable experience and coalition building in Arizona. Given all this, reports that one of the program's valuable "listening sessions" was cancelled without warning shortly before SSP allocations were announced is disappointing but unsurprising.

In their response to my June letter to FEMA, the agency said they "are grateful for the frontline work being done in your community to offer comprehensive care and support to noncitizen migrants." I hope that gratefulness extends to supporting the frontline work being done by Arizonans at the border, who work every day to ensure migrants are not sleeping in the streets of our communities.

Despite all this, your department still has a chance to get this right during the second round of SSP funding. I urge you to work with FEMA to support border communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ruben Gallego". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress