

March 16, 2015

Dear Senator:

As border, immigration, faith, labor, environmental, privacy, civil rights, and human rights advocates, we write to urge you to oppose S.208, the “Secure the Border First Act.” Instead of contributing to immigration reform, this bill would devastatingly militarize border communities, harm trade and tourism, despoil the environment where tens of millions of northern and southern border residents live, and imperil their privacy through constant, intrusive drone surveillance.

S.208 tests credulity by requiring a 100% perfect apprehension rate for unauthorized migrants at exorbitant cost and *without a plan in place*. History shows the inability of even totalitarian regimes like East Germany to force such control—the Berlin Wall was, fortunately, not impregnable. In 2013, House Homeland Security Committee Chairman Michael McCaul called the 100% standard “impossible to achieve.” Recalling billions of dollars wasted on the Department of Homeland Security’s failed SBInet program, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page’s deputy editor then observed that more wasteful, intrusive fencing will create “America’s Berlin Wall—a historic embarrassment.”

Our organizations come together in united opposition to S.208. We each bring our distinctive priorities and concerns, and rely on different arguments contained in this letter, but we stand unanimously in our conviction that S.208 would be disastrous for border communities. S.208 relegates these diverse, thriving, naturally beautiful borderlands to second-class status in the United States, as militarized buffer zones, and would hamper the booming regional trade and tourism that drive our national economy.

S.208 proposes unfunded spending of at least \$10 billion, which appears to be only a down payment on future extravagance. The Congressional Budget Office warned with respect to the House version, H.R. 399, that “CBO expects that [the Department of Homeland Security] will be unable to meet [the bill’s] deadlines for nearly all construction projects.” These billions are to be spent without including any oversight or accountability measures for the nation’s largest law enforcement agency – one of its most troubled – Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

Border communities are already straining under the weight of massive and unaccountable enforcement spending over the last decade. S.208 throws money at a bloated agency, along with equipment designed for and taken from theaters of war, rather than developing commonsense border policies that establish transparency, accountability, and oversight. The agency’s own former head of internal affairs has called at least eight of the 34 CBP-caused deaths since 2010 “highly suspect,” adding that “thousands of employees hired during an unprecedented expansion of the agency in the post-9/11 era are potentially unfit to carry a badge and gun.”

S.208’s waiver of environmental laws within 100 miles of U.S. land borders betrays the intergenerational compact of land stewardship for our borderlands. The Coalition of National Park Service Retirees previously called these waivers, “the most direct assault on national parks ever to be advanced at any level in any Congress in U.S. history.”

Moreover, the bill proposes a massive expansion of drone surveillance of all border residents, U.S. citizens and lawful immigrants included, despite the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General concluding *this year* that “we see no evidence that the drones contribute to a more secure border, and there is no reason to invest additional taxpayer funds at this time.”

At a time when immigration reform is urgently needed to offer aspiring Americans a broad and welcoming pathway to citizenship, S.208 is a highly irresponsible measure. It would have severely damaging fiscal, environmental, and privacy costs, and trample on the rights of tens of millions of residents who call border communities home. Congress must act instead to reform CBP’s operations by making enforcement more accountably respectful of human and civil rights and our environment.

S.208 is exactly the wrong way to address sensible border policy. We urge you to oppose it. Thank you for your consideration,

Aguilas Del Desierto Inc. (San Diego, California)
Alliance for a Just Society (National)
Alliance San Diego (San Diego, CA)
America’s Voice Education Fund (National)
American Civil Liberties Union (National)
American Friends Service Committee (National)
Annunciation House, Inc. (El Paso, Texas)
Arlington Unity Project (National)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC (National)
Asian Americans Advancing Justice-LA (Los Angeles, CA)
Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance, AFL-CIO (APALA) (National)
Black Alliance for Just Immigration (National)
Border Action Network (Arizona)
Border Encuentro (San Diego/Tijuana)
Cambridge United for Justice with Peace (National)
Casa San Jose (Pittsburgh, PA)
Central American Resource Center-Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)
Coalicion de Derechos Humanos (Tucson, AZ)
Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition (Colorado)
Commission on Justice of Glenmary Home Missioners (Rural South and Appalachia)
Daughters of Charity (Texas)
Detention Watch Network (National)
Dream Action Coalition (National)
El CENTRO de Igualdad y Derechos (Albuquerque, NM)
Employee Rights Center (San Diego, CA)
Encuentro (New Mexico)
Equality New Mexico (New Mexico)
Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project (Los Angeles, CA)
Farmworker Association of Florida (Florida)
Farmworker Justice (National)
First Congregational United Church of Christ (Ypsilanti, Michigan)
Franciscan Action Network (National)

Friends of Friendship Park (San Diego/Tijuana)
Frontera Audubon (Weslaco, Texas)
Greater Rochester Coalition for Immigration Justice (Rochester, NY)
Guatemalan Maya Center (Lake Worth, FL)
HIAS (National)
Holy Trinity Georgetown (National)
Humane Borders (Arizona)
Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (Illinois)
Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota (St. Paul, MN)
Interfaith Center for Worker Justice (San Diego, CA)
Jesuit Social Research Institute/Loyola University New Orleans (New Orleans, LA)
Justice Overcoming Boundaries (San Diego, CA)
La Hermandad Hank Lacayo Youth & Family Center (Oxnard, CA)
La Union del Pueblo Entero (San Juan, Texas)
Latin America Working Group (National)
Latino Roundtable
Law Office of Fabiola A. Navarro (San Diego, CA)
Law Office of Olga Pedroza (Las Cruces, NM)
League of United Latin American Citizens (National)
Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (Massachusetts)
MEChA de SDSU (San Diego, CA)
Michigan United (Dearborn, MI)
Movimiento del Valle por los Derechos Humanos (Condado Camerón)
Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano (Mexico/Regional)
NAACP (National)
National Alliance of Latin American and Caribbean Communities (NALACC) (National)
National Council of La Raza (National)
National Immigrant Justice Center (National)
National Immigrant Law Center (National)
National Immigration Project of the NLG (National)
National Korean American Service and Education Consortium (National)
National Network for Arab American Communities (National)
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (National)
Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest (Lincoln, NE)
New York Immigration Coalition (New York, NY)
Nicaragua Center for Community Action (Berkeley, CA)
NM Comunidades en Accion y de Fe (Las Cruces, NM)
NM Faith Coalition for Immigrant Justice (New Mexico)
No More Deaths (Arizona)
Northern Borders Coalition (Washington, Michigan, New York)
Pangea Legal Services (San Francisco, CA)
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans (National)
Paso del Norte Civil Rights Project (El Paso, Texas)
Proyecto Inmigrante (Fort Worth, TX)
RedMexicana de Lideres y Organizaciones Migrantes (National)
Reform Immigration for Texas Alliance (Texas)
Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services (RAICES) (Texas)
Refugio del Rio Grande (San Benito, TX)
Religious of the Assumption, Chaparral (Chaparral, NM)

Rio Grande Valley Equal Voice Network (Rio Grande Valley, Texas)
San Diego Immigrants Rights Consortium (San Diego, CA)
Sinsinawa Dominicans (Sinsinawa, Wisconsin)
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas (National)
Sisters of Mercy South Central (North Carolina)
Sisters of St. Joseph (National)
SOA Watch (National)
Somos Un Pueblo Unido (New Mexico)
Southern Border Communities Coalition (National)
Southwest Environmental Center (New Mexico)
Task Force on the Americas (California)
The Praxis Project (Washington, DC)
United We Dream (National)
University of Hawaii Biology Alumni Association (Honolulu, HI)
UURISE - Unitarian Universalist Refugee & Immigrant Services & Education (San Diego County, CA)
Washtenaw Interfaith Coalition for Immigrant Rights (Washtenaw County, Michigan)
Wayne Action for Racial Equality (Wayne County, NY)
We Belong Together (National)
We Count (Homestead, FL)
Wilco Justice Alliance (Williamson County, TX)
Women's Refugee Commission (National)
Worker Justice Center of NY (New York)