



Mitigating Migrant Deaths and Bringing Closure to Families of the Missing

MIGRANT DEATHS

9,460 migrant remains have been recovered by Border Patrol in the past 25 years. As identified by the GAO, this number excludes remains never found, making it a massive undercount. Many estimate the real number of deaths to be three to five times higher.

In 2021, the number of deaths in Brooks County, Texas tripled, and the U.S. Border Patrol reported more migrant deaths throughout the border region than any year on record.

Members of Congress should take the following actions to mitigate migrant deaths:

1. Repeal Title 42 and ensure access to asylum at ports of entry.

- Blocking the fundamental protection of asylum endangers the lives of threatened persons, as vulnerable migrants may decide to cross into the U.S. clandestinely.
- Blocking asylum protection violates U.S. and international laws.

2. Regularize migration for essential workers by expanding legal labor pathways, while enhancing labor protections.

- Increased legal labor pathways, including temporary and seasonal labor migration opportunities, will reduce dangerous, clandestine crossings and mitigate deaths.
- With 11M open jobs and a decades-long population decline, U.S. labor demand is high.
- Increased legal pathways including for family reunification, will reduce the number of migrants who use human smugglers, impacting the money flowing to trans-national criminal organizations.

3. Call for improvements to search and rescue operations.

- Install BORSTAR agents (Border Patrol Search, Trauma and Rescue Unit) at all Border Patrol stations to quickly respond to migrants in distress.
- Intensify installation of rescue beacons in areas where remains are frequently encountered.

CLOSURE FOR FAMILIES

Burials of unknown remains without DNA collection make identifying the dead impossible. DNA submitted by families of the missing is not shared across borders, preventing family matches.

Members of Congress should take these actions to help families with missing loved ones:

1. Officially recognize the high number of migrant deaths in our southwest border region as a mass disaster.

- A mass disaster is a mass fatality event that exceeds the capacity of local resources and requires financial assistance from the state or federal government.

2. Facilitate the creation of centralized identification centers in states with no regional or centralized medical examiners, such as Texas, and also in states that experience fatalities that equate to a mass disaster, such as Arizona.

- These states are inundated with remains and need assistance due to limited capacity and disorganization of human remains data. In Texas, identifications are further prevented by haphazard treatment of remains, poor communication, and lack of training.
- Operation Identification at Texas State University helps manage caseloads, but this is not sustainable. Infrastructure exists that can be transferred to states and scaled up.

3. Call for centralized, trans-national sharing of DNA data.

- The FBI does not share data from its DNA database, CODIS (Combined DNA Index System), across borders and severely restricts DNA collected in other countries, which prevents identifications.
- The FBI and the University of North Texas recently created a trial humanitarian DNA database, which is a positive step. However, the database only compares DNA at the state level, which excludes nearly 50% of possible identifications.
- Identifying the maximum number of remains requires comparing DNA at a national level, sharing DNA data trans-nationally, and accepting DNA data collected abroad.

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