

February 12, 2025

The Honorable Lindsey Graham  
Chairman  
United States Senate Committee on the  
Budget  
624 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jodey Arrington  
Chairman  
United States House Committee on the  
Budget  
204 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jeffrey Merkley  
Ranking Member  
United States Senate Committee on the  
Budget  
608 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Brendan Boyle  
Ranking Member  
United States House Committee on the  
Budget  
507 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Merkley, Chairman Arrington, and Ranking Member Boyle:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, the undersigned organizations write in strong opposition to spending more money on border wall construction, including through the budget reconciliation process. The more than 700 miles of border wall and barrier systems that already exist have wasted billions of taxpayer dollars, harmed border communities, and destroyed unique ecosystems. Despite this track record, members in both chambers are now considering spending additional tens of billions of dollars to “finish the wall.” Our organizations urge you to oppose these attempts.

American taxpayers have already spent approximately \$18.74 billion to construct hundreds of miles of damaging, ineffective border wall.<sup>1</sup> And yet, this waste of valuable resources has amounted to little more than an opportunity for political theatrics and deadly photo opportunities. The truth is that, according to the FBI’s own statistics, border communities continue to be some of the safest places in the country, having some of the lowest rates of murders and violent crime.<sup>2</sup> And apprehensions along the southwest border have decreased 70 percent over the last six months in 2024 compared to the same time in 2023.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the Congressional Research Service, the General Accountability Office, and the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General’s Office have all criticized decision-making around the wall, including failure to analyze alternative means of deterrence, lack of cost estimates for operation and maintenance of the wall (an early estimate was 15% annually of total costs), and lack of analysis regarding the effectiveness of the wall in meeting CBP’s goals.<sup>4</sup> Border wall construction has been a colossal waste of resources.

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<sup>1</sup> Feb., 2017, *Southwest Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing’s Contributions to Operations and Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps*, <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-331>; March 20, 2024, *DHS Border Barrier Funding Developments: FY 2021-2024*, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/homsec/R47979.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Bogan, “Crime in border cities is lower than non-border cities, according to FBI data,” Straight Arrow News (October 3, 2024), available at <https://san.com/cc/crime-in-border-cities-is-lower-than-non-border-cities-according-to-fbi-data/>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Customs and Border Protection. *CBP Releases December 2024 Monthly Update*. January 14, 2025. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-releases-december-2024-monthly-update>

<sup>4</sup> See e.g., July 14, 2020: *CBP Has Not Demonstrated Acquisition Capabilities Needed to Secure*, <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2020-07/OIG-20-52-Jul20.pdf>; February, 2017, *Southwest Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing’s Contributions to Operations and*

The border wall has significantly harmed communities along the U.S.-Mexico border. The wall and its associated infrastructure have created artificial levees that prevent water from following its natural course and exacerbate flooding that damages property and costs lives on both sides of the border.<sup>5</sup> Several federally recognized Tribes live in the borderlands and wall construction has had devastating effects on tribal cultural sites and on tribal resources. Burial sites have been both blown up and dug up, sacred plants have been destroyed, and religious practices have been disrupted.<sup>6</sup> Finally, much of the remaining land that has not yet been walled off is on private land that will have to be obtained through eminent domain for border wall construction. For example, nineteen communities in Texas, from El Paso to Brownsville, have passed resolutions against the border wall, but previous administrations have seized land from ranchers, farmers, and families against the wishes of local governments and landowners. If the border wall is built throughout Texas, ranches, parks, and other pieces of land roughly equivalent to the size of Rhode Island would be cut off between the river and the wall.

Border wall construction has also damaged some of the most unique, biodiverse, and sensitive ecosystems left in the United States. The existing border wall destroys habitat, blocks migration routes, traps and drowns animals during floods, and cuts off food and water sources.<sup>7</sup> The wall bisects some of the most sensitive habitat in the United States including many of our nation's most prized national wildlife refuges, forests, parks and wilderness areas and crossing the ranges of more than 1,500 plants and animals including 83 species listed under the Endangered Species Act such as the critically imperiled Mexican wolf, jaguar, ocelot, bighorn sheep, and Sonoran pronghorn. A peer reviewed 2024 camera study along the Arizona border revealed an 86% reduction in wildlife crossings compared to places with vehicle barriers.<sup>8</sup> It has also severely degraded recreational activities on these highly valued public lands.

Lastly, all of this harm and destruction has been and will almost assuredly continue to be implemented without the guardrails of our nation's laws and public safeguards. This is because Congress, as part of the 2005 REAL ID Act, granted the Secretary of Homeland Security authority to waive all legal requirements that the Secretary, in his or her sole discretion, determined necessary to expedite border barrier and road construction.<sup>9</sup> To date, 83 laws have been waived, including procurement and contracting laws, laws to protect religious freedom, environmental laws, and laws protecting Native Americans, communities, wildlife, farmland, archaeological sites, coastal management, national park land and national wildlife refuges,

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*Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps*, available here: <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-331>; July, 2018, *Southwest Border Security: CBP Is Evaluating Designs and Locations for Border Barriers but Is Proceeding Without Key Information*, available here: <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-18-614>

<sup>5</sup> ACLU, *Death, Damage, and Failure: Past, Present, and Future Impacts of Walls on the U.S.-Mexico Border*. September 12, 2018. [https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/publications/aclu-report-updates\\_0.pdf](https://assets.aclu.org/live/uploads/publications/aclu-report-updates_0.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> GAO, *Southwest Border: Additional Actions Needed to Address Cultural and Natural Resource Impacts from Barrier Construction*, Sept. 2023; *Kumeyaay Nation protests border wall construction*, July 27, 2020, <https://goldengatexpress.org/93485/protests/kumeyaay-nation-protests-border-wall-construction/>

<sup>7</sup> See, e.g., *Nature Divided, Scientists United: US-Mexico Border Wall Threatens Biodiversity and Binational Conservation*, signed by more than 2,500 scientists, Oct. 2018, *Bioscience*, Vol. 68 No. 10, available at <https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/article-abstract/68/10/740/5057517?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

<sup>8</sup> *U.S. Mexico border wall impedes wildlife movement*, *Front. Ecol. Evol.*, 20 November 2024, available at <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/ecology-and-evolution/articles/10.3389/fevo.2024.1487911/full#h1>

<sup>9</sup> *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996*, Pub. L. No. 104-208, Stat. 3009, 3009-544 (codified as amended at 8 U.S.C. §1103 note), Section 102(c), as amended.

wilderness, and air and water. The waivers also exempt wall construction from all state, local and other legal requirements related to the same subject matter as the waived federal laws.

Border wall construction has already cost the American public billions of dollars and has been an abject failure. It is opposed by people who are most directly impacted by it, including local landowners and Tribes. It damages property and has caused countless deaths through flooding, falls, and forcing migrants to take riskier routes. It destroys public lands and special places that are world-renowned for their beauty, biodiversity, and history. And it is advanced under the cover of secrecy owing to the broadest exemptions of good governance, environmental, and civil rights laws in United States history. We urge you to oppose any and all efforts this Congress to add to this horrific track record by dedicating even more resources to border wall construction. Instead, Congress should fund efforts to remediate the damage caused by the existing wall, rescind the REAL ID waivers, and listen to the actual needs of border communities.

Sincerely,

Center for Biological Diversity  
Climate Justice Alliance  
DamDol Enterprises  
Defenders of Wildlife  
Earthjustice  
Endangered Species Coalition  
Friends of International Friendship Park  
Friends of the Sonoran Desert  
Friends of the Wildlife Corridor  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness  
GreenLatinos  
Humane Borders  
Latino Outdoors  
Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center  
No Border Wall Coalition Laredo  
Northern Jaguar Project  
Patagonia Area Resource Alliance  
Rachel Carson Council  
Rachel's Network  
Resource Renewal Institute  
RESTORE: The North Woods  
Rio Grande International Study Center  
RiSE  
Sacred Plants Biocultural Recovery Initiative  
San Pedro 100  
Sierra Club  
Sierra Club Santa Barbara CA Group  
Sky Island Alliance  
Southern Border Communities Coalition  
The Rewilding Institute  
The Wilderness Society  
Tohono O'odham Nation, San Xavier District  
Western Watersheds Project  
WildEarth Guardians  
Wildlands Network