

August 21, 2023

The Honorable Merrick Garland  
U.S. Department of Justice  
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20530-0001

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Attorney General Garland and Secretary Mayorkas:

On behalf of UnidosUS, the nation's largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization, I write to share our deep concerns with the policies of Texas Governor Greg Abbott on the southern border, under his Operation Lone Star (OLS), that have wreaked havoc on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people for more than two years and have reached abhorrent and unimaginable new levels this summer.

In short, we believe that Governor Abbott has yet to be held fully accountable for the egregious, inhumane, and life-threatening acts he has inflicted not only on migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, but also on the nearly half of Texans who are Hispanic. Given the dire situation in which people have had their rights violated, suffered severe injuries, or even lost their lives due to these cruel stunts, it is incumbent that both the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) take ownership over and work hand-in-hand to ensure that these practices are ended immediately, and that Governor Abbott be held accountable to the fullest extent possible.

For example, we have heard from our UnidosUS Affiliates on the ground and many others in the state that migrants have been involuntarily placed on, or deceived into joining, the highly publicized OLS busing of these migrants to other parts of the country. Authorities have also instructed the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) and members of the National Guard to push young children back into the Rio Grande River and to deny water to migrants. It is also alleged that DPS has separated some families arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border and that migrants have been injured or even killed by the buoys deployed in the river, which have become the tragic and deadly symbol of Governor Abbott's cruel and unnecessary actions.

Our concerns, though, go beyond the border. Policies purporting to target migrant smugglers are instead being used to disproportionately harass Latino drivers, regardless of citizenship status, in traffic stops and searches, especially in counties with large Hispanic populations. And we know that several civil rights groups have already filed lawsuits challenging policies that have arrested alleged migrants trespassing on private property simply on the basis of their appearance, a clear case of racial and ethnic profiling.

Given the scope and breadth of potential violations of both civil rights law and immigration policies, we firmly believe that DOJ and DHS must coordinate to enforce federal laws and policies in Texas. Specifically, we are asking DOJ and DHS to commit to:

- 1- Complete existing investigations into Texas as to whether the governor's Operation Lone Star violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and illegally preempts federal authority over immigration policies.
- 2- Open new investigations into whether the latest actions are resulting in similar violations.
- 3- Bring lawsuits against any violations of these federal laws and policies.

Your leadership and cooperation in intervening against the horrific actions of Governor Abbot on the border have never been timelier and more necessary. By working together to end such practices and prevent such actions in the future, we hope that you can ensure that our community is treated with dignity, humanity, and fairness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murguía". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Murguía  
President and CEO