



Contact: Julia Benitez Sullivan  
Phone: 956.292.7026  
Email: [public.info@co.hidalgo.tx.us](mailto:public.info@co.hidalgo.tx.us)

## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Monday, June 23, 2014**

### **OTM IMMIGRATION: COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ELECTED OFFICIALS BRIEFED ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND HUMANITARIAN EFFORTS**

#### **Hidalgo County Commissioners' Court**

**Ramon Garcia**  
*County Judge*

**A. C. Cuellar, Jr.**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 1*

**Hector "Tito" Palacios**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 2*

**Joe M. Flores**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 3*

**Joseph Palacios**  
*Commissioner, Precinct 4*

#### **OFFICE OF HIDALGO COUNTY JUDGE RAMON GARCIA**

#### **Public Affairs Division**

302 W. University Drive  
Edinburg, Texas 78539  
(956) 292-7026 P  
(956) 292-7766 F  
[www.co.hidalgo.tx.us](http://www.co.hidalgo.tx.us) W  
[public.info@co.hidalgo.tx.us](mailto:public.info@co.hidalgo.tx.us) E

**MCALLEN** – On Monday, June 23, 2014, Hidalgo County and the City of McAllen held a briefing with area leaders, health and safety officials, Border Patrol, Texas Department of Public Safety and Catholic Charities on the influx of Central American immigrants traveling through the Texas/Mexico border.

Hidalgo County Judge Ramon Garcia stated the meeting being held was to discuss the humanitarian efforts being conducted, border and county safety concerns, as well as health concerns.

“This meeting is not to find a resolution, however to discuss what is being done to handle to this humanitarian crises,” said Garcia. “Our health department, law enforcement, emergency management and community leaders need to get accurate information from the sources involved to inform the community.”

With the apprehension of close to 1,100 undocumented immigrants per day, Kevin W. Oaks, Chief Border Patrol RGV Valley Sector, addressed how his office is handling the situation.

“We are utilizing all our resources, which means receiving assistance from other agencies to process all the undocumented immigrants as they turn themselves in to our agents patrolling high traffic areas,” said Oaks.

Oaks said his office added 16 agents to the over 3,000 working in his Area of Responsibility to help with the surge of immigrants.

“We are making sure we have the man power to secure the border and assist in processing them,” Oaks said.

RGV Valley Sector Border Patrol Deputy Chief Raul Ortiz pointed to a map of Central America and the Southern portion of North America with a red line showing that the closest route into the U.S. through Mexico is along the Rio Grande Valley.

Ortiz said the RGV sector has apprehended close to 180,000 undocumented immigrants in Fiscal Year 2014, adding that most are from Central America.

– MORE –



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"About 75 percent of undocumented immigrants are from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador," Ortiz said. "When we process them, we are thoroughly checking for any criminal background and if they do, we try to get all the information out of them."

Jose Rodriguez, Regional Commander for the Texas Department of Public Safety, stated that in the 26 years of service he has never seen such cooperation and support from local agencies as he has seen recently. He informed the group that his agency's main focus is helping to insure the border is secure and to provide support.

"As you know, we are not doing driver's license checkpoints," said Rodriguez. "Our officers are ensuring the protection of the community and a UAC's (unaccompanied alien children) family unit."

Several cities and charity organizations have come to the assistance of Hidalgo County's humanitarian crises according to City of McAllen Emergency Management Coordinator Kevin Pagan. He explained how family units are processed and released to nearby transportation hubs where an individual may wait for up to 24 hours for their departure.

"It is when Border Patrol drops them off at a bus terminal that does not have showers or enough bathrooms for the undocumented immigrants while they wait," said Pagan. "It is obvious that during this time is when humanitarian assistance is needed."

Local charities such as, the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and Sacred Heart Church in McAllen have provided shelters equipped with cots, food and showers for the undocumented immigrants. The shelters are housing 40 to 70 undocumented immigrants a night, and since the City of McAllen began to document these numbers seven days ago, approximately 3,000 have been helped, Pagan said.

According to Pagan, the operation is being run as a Transient Shelter Operation due to the 99 percent of the undocumented immigrants being deported out of the area. The longest they stay is 24 hours as they wait for their bus ride to another destination, he added.

"Right now I don't think an emergency needs to be declared," said Garcia. "Our operations are being conducted and are handling the situation."

Before leaving, the undocumented immigrants participate in a physical check-up provided by volunteer medical personal, reported Eddie Olivarez, Chief Administrator Hidalgo County Health and Human Services. Olivarez said local agencies including, South Texas College, University of Texas-Pan American, RGV Pharmaceutical Group, and federal agencies have provided the medical resources needed for the undocumented immigrants.

Olivarez said the public need not be concerned about the threat of communicable diseases being brought into the area by undocumented immigrants, adding the most common health issues among them are allergies, the common cold, dehydration, and malnourishment.

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