

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on State Affairs
For HB 7

Compiled on: Thursday, April 13, 2023 2:16 AM

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Hearing Date: April 12, 2023 10:30 AM - or upon final adjourn./recess or bill referral if permission granted

Sarah Bentley

self

Austin, TX

Please do not pass this harmful bill.

Michael Hurewitz

self -- Psychotherapist

Austin, TX

As a psychotherapist who treats trauma, I understand the violence, terror and poverty that drive many people to seek refuge in the U.S. Please vote NO on HB 7. By appropriating funds that incentivize a hyper focus on enforcement-only immigration and public safety policy, HB7 imposes an entirely militaristic vision for life in border communities. Under HB7 border communities would feel immense financial pressure to participate in the criminalization of the most vulnerable people in our society – people seeking refuge from violence, terror, and poverty – with no real oversight. Texas needs to invest in solutions for border communities’ real issues, and stop investing in policies that make the humanitarian emergency at our border worse. A local economy that is dependent on locking people in cages is not the solution. Border Texans share common problems that the Legislature continues to ignore in favor of pouring more and more resources into border militarization. The Legislature should create incentive structures that a) improve Border Texans’ access to healthcare resources, particularly specialists and mental health care professionals b) address fundamental problems with infrastructure throughout the border, including in colonias where frequent flooding creates dangers and health risks, and c) allow Border Texans to stay in their communities to pursue sustainable and professional career paths that are not reliant on the border militarization complex. Rather than pitting immigrants and border communities against each other, the Legislature could serve both by writing legislation based on dignity and not destruction.

Jim Steele

Self

Cedar Park, TX

I support this bill.

Kamala Platt, Dr.
self educator
San Antonio, TX

I taught in the Tx. border region for five years and saw that communities there were safest and most peaceful when/ where there were the most possibilities for cross-border interaction and communities from both sides were involved with each other. Please stop HB 7 which will only limit the freedoms of peace-loving people in the borderlands.

Rachael Duke
self
San Antonio, TX

The state does not have the expertise, resources, or authority to fairly address complex matters of asylum claims without risk of discrimination and disregard for federal and international law.

Instead of duplicating and reimagining federal border enforcement efforts on their own, we urge our Texas legislators to create policy that supports and collaborates with the federal government on matters at the border.

Reed Bilz, Ms
Self
Fort Worth, TX

I OPPOSE HB 7 because Instead of promoting or providing solutions that border communities urgently need, HB7 exploits local economic vulnerability for the racist priorities of State leadership. I urge you to vote AGAINST this bill.

Cindy Ballard
Self/Ballard Water Well
Brownsboro, TX

We need stop this open border, killings, raping, cartel and sex trafficking

Itai Almor
Self
Austin, TX

My name is Itai Almor, and I live in Austin. I ask you to vote no on HB 7. I grew up in South Carolina in a largely hispanic area, and from childhood I saw what the overpolicing and criminalization of their community does to the people. Families are ripped apart, my school was damaged by the pain and fear our friends suffered. I saw the same thing play out when I attended university at Yale. ICE terrorized New Haven's people. The city did not benefit, did not get "safer", only more sad, more scared and hurt. The reasons folks come to the U.S. do not change when we treat them with worse and worse punishments upon their arrival, only our humanity is degraded as we degrade theirs. A real solution to the problems of unregulated immigration and crime would be investment in communities and social services. I work now as a social worker in a middle school in East Austin. I work directly with children whose lives are impacted by legislation like this more so than anyone, children with incarcerated parents, who struggle to focus because they're hungry and stressed - grandma's cleaning job this weekend fell through, or dad ran out of gas and we were stuck till 4AM... children who suffer because powerful grown ups enforce an order that keeps their families struggling for their every last ounce of dignity. They are the ones who'll be most wounded by a bill like this, and we as a community only as good as we can take care of our children.

Anna Weeks
DHI mortgage
Austin, TX

I am against this bill. It would due process violate rights.

Richie Grant
Arklatex Assessment
Texarkana, TX
I support thos bill.

Cindy Fountain, Ms
TXUUJM, Texas Unitarian Universalist Justice Ministry
Cleburne, TX

I oppose this bill. It would write into the law the separate and unequal border courts that will cost taxpayers millions of dollars in lawsuits. In addition, it exploits local economic vulnerability for the racist priorities of State leadership. Thank you.

Estefani Rios
Self, College Student
Leander, TX

I am submitting this public comment against House Bill 7. The proposal of the Bill weaponizes the State's judicial and educational systems and exploits border cities that face economic hardships to make them dependent on the inhumane practices regarding immigrants. Creating a border criminal system in addition to the established court system will allow unjust legal actions that immigrants face to prevail. For example, through Operation Lone Star, accused immigrants and U.S citizens are stripped of their Due Process rights via high bond amounts, long wait times for defense appointments, and are held in worse jail conditions than others. Additionally, creating the Border Institution Grant Program traps residents of border communities into following careers in the border militarization complex. These communities do need access to quality education. However, they will not receive this through schools that HB7 rewards to keep people in those careers, as it only makes them more dependent on jobs that force people into cages. It robs people of their autonomy and fails to address issues like mental healthcare and flooding that residents of border communities also face. House Bill 7 would make the humanitarian emergency at the border worse. It will not improve it. Instead, Legislature should focus on creating incentive structures that improve Texans' access to healthcare resources, like mental healthcare professionals and quality infrastructure throughout the border to prevent the frequent floodings and dangers associated with them. Finally, the Legislature should let Border Texans stay in their beloved communities to pursue sustainable careers that do not rely on the border militarization complex. Do not pit Border Texans and immigrants against each other. Instead, focus on the dignity of their persons and not devastation when creating legislature that affects them.

Linda Hanratty
self
Fort Worth, TX

I oppose HB 7 that would create a separate state court program for all border-related crime We do not need a separate state court that would likely institutionalize an unequal court system for undocumented immigrants. As with the rest of the Governor's Lone Star Program this court system would likely be costly, unproductive, and unjust. Instead of promoting or providing solutions that border communities urgently need, HB7 exploits local economic vulnerability for the racist priorities of State leadership.

Hal Cosentino
self, full-time student
Austin, TX

I am against HB 7. Pleas do NOT write into the law the separate and unequal border courts that have been happening under Operation Lone Star. I am also against funding for a border wall.

James Allen, Rev.
North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church & Texas Impact
Carrollton, TX

We oppose. Treating our immigrant neighbors as equals to criminals bring in illicit drugs by creating this separate court system is an unjust action. Seizures occur predominantly at border crossings rather than between the crossings.

Malena Pennycook

self

Austin, TX

HB7: I am AGAINST HB7. We should NOT write into the law the separate and unequal border courts that have been happening under Operation Lone Star. I do NOT believe we should provide funding for a border wall.

Zaena Zamora

Self

MCallen, TX

I am writing to strongly urge you to oppose HB 7, which only serves to perpetuate the ongoing humanitarian crisis at our border. Rather than investing in policies that address the real issues faced by border communities, this bill continues to pour resources into border militarization, ignoring the urgent needs of those who call this region home.

It is time for the Legislature to stop relying on a local economy that profits from locking people in cages. Instead, we need to create incentive structures that address the fundamental problems with infrastructure throughout the border, including in colonias where frequent flooding creates dangers and health risks.

Furthermore, improving Border Texans' access to healthcare resources, especially specialists and mental health care professionals, must be a top priority. As a life long Rio Grande Valley resident, I strongly believe that the Legislature must prioritize creating sustainable and professional career paths that do not rely on the border militarization complex.

We should not pit immigrants and border communities against each other. Rather than investing in policies that only exacerbate the already dire situation at our border, let us focus on solutions that are based on dignity and respect for all individuals. We must work together to create legislation that addresses the urgent needs of border communities and provides a pathway to sustainable and equitable growth.

I urge you to reject HB 7 and instead support policies that invest in the well-being of all Texans, regardless of their background or immigration status. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Zaena Zamora

Hector Valle

Texas Border Coalition

Austin, TX

Oppose

Theresa Zelasko

Self

Austin, TX

I strongly urge the Committee Members to vote AGAINST HB 7. Instead of promoting or providing solutions that border communities urgently need, HB7 exploits local economic vulnerability for the racist priorities of State leadership.

Thank you.

Susan Stewart
self
Pflugerville, TX

Since the founding of Texas and most likely before that, there have been small vigilante groups who call for frontier justice or hanged people because they had black skin. A child of God was hanged for having the an unapproved skin color. HB 7 is just another effort in the long list of crimes against children of God and the decades long push to arm citizens to go after people they don't approve or like.

I would hope that our own sense of justice has evolved in the last 100+ years. A hallmark of America is our system of laws. The majority party in the Tx House is a law and order party, or claim to be. To call for the marshalling of a vigilante force is in direct conflict with a Texan's sense of right and wrong, crime and punishment, and who we are as a civilized society.

Vote against this bill. Defeat it in committee and shame on all of the legislators who think this is a bill Texans would be proud of. You claim to be Christians, yet your actions speak otherwise.

Cathy Elmore
self, 1st Congregational Church, TMO, Texas impact
Houston, TX

I oppose HB 7 by Guillen. HB 7 would create a separate state court program for all border related crime. We have spent billions of dollars on "border related crime" beginning with 2005, with little or no hard evidence to prove that our tax dollars have gotten us anything. Moreover, our EXISTING state courts are badly in need of additional courts to move the huge backlog of cases for ordinary Texans. Our emphasis should be on existing courts and not on the fear-mongering about border security.

Margaret Welch
Self
Austin, TX

Hello, my name is Maggie Welch. I am testifying against this bill. I live in Austin in an intergenerational housing co-op in Austin. I am strongly against this bill because it would support racial profiling of many of the people I love and care about in my community. No person should have to live in constant fear of violence and bias at the hands of the State and HB7 and HB20 would criminalize people on account of their race and location. I spoke with a woman who was wrongfully detained for 2 months and separated from her family already in Texas and she had finally been let go. Locking people like this up has never successfully created safety in the community and it never will. This woman and her family, who were legal immigrants trying to find safety and home in this country are being scapegoated for crimes and drug wars they had nothing to do with. It's very unsettling considering the history of scapegoating and detainment throughout history, specifically in the Holocaust. We can solve some problems that are being blamed on immigrant by providing actually accurate information about drug use from a harm reduction approach, educating people about and distributing naran, paying people in this country a liveable wage, supporting affordable housing, and creating more programs for that focus on community interaction and address the mental health crisis from a community care perspective.

Eric Diaz
ACLU of Texas
Austin, TX

The American Civil Liberties Union of Texas (ACLU of Texas) respectfully opposes H.B. 7, a bill that appears to create a court system duplicative of the one under Operation Lone Star, where people are already arrested for actions falling into the vaguely-defined term "border crimes."

Issues with courts participating in Operation Lone Star illustrate the significant challenges associated with creating this kind of court and separate systems of justice will inevitably be unjust and unequal. In addition to the duplicative and unserviceable nature of H.B. 7, key elements of the bill would remain unsettled even if the bill were to become law.

First, "border issues" is a broad and vague description of the focus of the border courts. The Department of Public Safety has reported drug interdictions hundreds of miles from the border as part of Operation Lone Star. It is concerning to think what jurisdiction these courts might assign themselves without clearer purpose. This lack of clarity may make it more difficult for a defendant to engage in their Sixth Amendment right to legal representation and may violate their right to a speedy trial.

Second, these courts are unnecessary as any cases arising in the border region should be handled by existing courts. Participation in Operation Lone Star or creating border courts as proposed in HB 7 diverts local criminal justice capacity away from existing public safety priorities. A parallel court system will require space in the jail, time from local bailiffs and courts personnel, and other local infrastructure. HB 7 fails to meet its purported goal of supporting local communities in border regions, where the real need at the border is humanitarian assistance and not more courts or police.

Kathryn Hall
N/A
San Marcos, TX
Against

Tracy Bloom
Self
College Station, TX
Agree and praying to pass

Rachael Shannon
self, artist
Austin, TX

I am strongly against the formation of courts in the name of "border protection" that stand to further violate the civil and human rights of migrants, as well as U.S. citizens and nationals in our country. I have already witnessed first hand nationals in our state enduring court processes without representation far from their homes in the kind of actions that are the antithesis of what our government is supposed to stand for. I am against HB 7's capitalizing on imagined threats and fake dangers, stoking fear to enact racist and unAmerican legislation.

Barry Thistlethwaite
Self
Dallas, TX

I support HB7's border courts and grants addressing the effects of ongoing criminal activity at the border.

Kelley Rumps
self retired
The Woodlands, TX
I support HB 7

Hannah Bellamah
Never Again Action
Austin, TX

I am here to ask you to vote no on HB7 and HB20. If passed these bills enable racial profiling within the police force. Additionally, migrants at the border are normal people who deserve the support of our communities. We are not currently in need of stricter border policies when adding better infrastructure to support migrants is much more effective. These bills only serve to bolster a system in which it is acceptable to separate children from their parents and imprison innocent people. It is for these reasons that I ask you to vote no on HB7 and HB20.

Zachary Shell
Self (customer service worker)
Austin, TX

To the Legislature:

I staunchly oppose House Bill 7, as the priorities it creates for responding to immigration at the border are inhumane and designed to vastly expand policing and harmful treatment of migrants rather than truly address the struggles faced by border communities. I believe the border courts that HB 7 seeks to establish would open the door to large-scale abuses of judicial power, funneling migrants into a system designed to criminalize and detain them en masse rather than actually process their cases, and allow for the intrusion of private and political agendas and funding into this country's legal process. I also disapprove of the education program it intends to develop: I think rather than actually solving the complex variety of issues affecting education in these underserved communities, the program aims to shunt more Texans into enforcing harm at the border and is taking advantage of economic depression in order to cultivate a larger border militia. HB 7 seems to me to be a politically motivated and brazen expansion of state power that would vastly prop up Governor Abbott's draconian and wasteful Operation Lone Star, and I do not believe it would make this state any safer - in fact, much the opposite, as it would contribute to the militarization and overpolicing of the border region, making it more dangerous for the impoverished minority communities that live there, who are already more likely to face abuse and harm from law enforcement and the state's judicial branch. It deeply concerns me that Human Rights Watch has decried this bill and the related HB20, and as a Texan, I cannot stand for this kind of cruel, dangerous infringement on liberty, nor can I stand for any bills that approach immigration as a problem to be solved via punishment, incarceration, and bolstering of the state's latitude to deal harshly with immigrants. There is no need to allocate the money this bill does to a project like Operation Lone Star, which has disproportionately negatively affected communities of color across our state, rather than to the underfunded infrastructure, schools, medical systems, and more which keep our state running and suffer year after year from subpar funding. I urge the State Affairs Committee to please prevent HB7 from passing and to not support border legislation with its violent priorities in the future.

Nora Mata, Coordinator
Border Workers United
San Benito, TX

I'm against this bill because it would criminalize more our immigrant communities

Kathy Ponce
Self
Maypearl, TX
I support this bill

Cathy Edm
Myself
Maypearl, TX
Please pass this!!

Stacy Mayfield
Self Retired
Midlothian, TX
I support HB 7

G Brent Edminster
Self
Maypearl, TX

Please pass this Bill and protect the American Citizens without the continual financial burden we taxpayers have to continue to fund.

Linda Christopher, Mrs.
Val Verde County Republican Women
Del Rio, TX

Secure our borders and keep us safe. I live in Del Rio and am afraid to get on the highway as I'm a widow.

Hailee Harris
Myself
Austin, TX

As a Texas citizen, I urge you to support this bill and protect Texas!

Katy Jackson, Councilperson
City of Rockport and self
Rockport, TX

The City of Rockport is a City which believes in the rule of law. The illegal immigration measures addressed in this bill are a direct need due to inaction by the various federal entities which are not performing the duties the State of Texas requires. Everyone wanting to immigrate to the United States should come to the United States legally at a port entry not where ever there is a hole in the border. Illegal entry to the US is a felony and why can the State of Texas not do the same?

The State of Texas must do what the federal government cannot - close the border. Legal immigration is a felony and needs to be stopped by any means necessary.

Many people who spoke against this bill today talk about everything but border security. Do our counties, cities and towns need assistance with infrastructure, health concerns, etc? Yes! Contrary to their statements, these issues exist all over Texas and not just the border counties.

While I have not seen the committee substitute, I urge you to pass this bill on for a full House vote. A country without a border is no country at all!

Lynn Morris
Self
Austin, TX

Please support this bill.....

Kathleen Ocker
self
Kerrville, TX

I support passage of this bill. We have a legal process for those who wish to immigrate.

Ava Romberg

Self

Austin, TX

I do not think this bill should be passed. It is unnecessary and dangerous to people who don't deserve it.

Ava Storbeck

Citizen Texan

Corpus Christi, TX

Please secure our United States and Texas Border

Silvia Reveles-Scheller, Ms

Self/ formerly Austin Catholic Diocese/TIRC

Austin, TX

This bill is attempt by Greg Abbott and Guillen to illegally circumvent federal immigration law. Furthermore it is an attempt create a vague set of regs to form a psuedo immigration court along the border. It gives extraordinary and unlawful powers to local courts to interrupt highly complex immigration law.

The financial priority of the militarization along the already empoverish border reflects the desire of white supremacist Greg Abbott goal to deny the reality that Texas Demographics will continue to be younger, more liberal and darker. His war on race is futile but will create much harm.

Vote against this bill.

Jim Elmore, Member Social Justice Committee

St. Thomas PCUSA

Houston, TX

HB 7 I oppose HB 7 by Guillen. HB 7 would create a separate state court program for all border related crime. We have spent billions of dollars on "border related crime" beginning with 2005, with little or no hard evidence to prove that our tax dollars have gotten us anything. Moreover, our EXISTING state courts are badly in need of additional courts to move the huge backlog of cases for ordinary Texans. Our emphasis should be on existing courts and not on the fear-mongering about border security.

Oswald Nira
Self-Educator
San Antonio, TX

I have been an educator and member of formation teams for over 40 years in South and Central Texas. Currently I am a member of a San Antonio faith community, Mission Concepción. My education and formation experiences with migrant and 1st generation young adults and families compel me to oppose HB 7 and HB 20. I strongly urge you to oppose these bills and not advance them out of the House State Affairs committee.

Migrant and 1st generation individuals and families tell harrowing tales of danger, loss and violence from border experiences. HB 20 will only accelerate these experiences and further harm our communities and asylum seekers. HB 20 will empower vigilantes to roam border community streets—and likely any street in Texas cities and towns—causing more chaos and violence towards vulnerable migrants. Moreover, HB 7 will increase the problems of Operation Lone Star, where immigrants and US citizens are stripped of their due process rights through high bond amounts, longer wait times for defense appointments, and inhumane jail conditions.

Rather than spend monies to fund HB 20 and HB 7, Texans would be better served to develop the Texas state-wide power grid, school safety structures and stronger mental health care services. As a faith formation educator, measures that strengthen relationships between communities, rather than empower confrontation, vigilantism and violence, are more consistent with the pioneering spirit of Texas (“Friends”). Rather than deputize Texas citizens to harass and persecute migrants, empower social services and faith communities to hear the voices of migrants and begin the process of integrating them into our society for our mutual benefit, as so many migrants have experienced throughout the history of Texas. Insist that members of the US Congress develop an immigration policy that respects the dignity of all individuals and families—both migrants and Texas residents—and humanely and productively mutually benefits all members.

Tracy Shannon
Self
KINGWOOD, TX

Please support this bill. Thank you.

Alexandra Schilling
Self - Mom and Candidate for school board
Garwood, TX

I support.

Janna Canard
Texas UU Justice Ministry
Fort Worth, TX

I oppose HB 7. It would use the State’s budget to institutionalize Operation Lone Star as a permanent fixture in Texas public policy. It would dedicate substantial funding streams to existing and new institutions that would further militarize and over-police the border. Instead of promoting or providing solutions that border communities urgently need, HB7 exploits local economic vulnerability for the racist priorities of State leadership. I urge you to do the right thing and vote against this legislation.

Linzy Foster
Self
Austin, TX

I oppose this bill in its entirety.

Kim Roland
Self / Retired / Ranching
Lockhart, TX

I SUPPORT this bill and appreciate Rep. Guillen's attention to these important border issues.

Janice Ohrt, Ms
Self. Rancher
Victoria, TX

HB 7 is a companion bill to HB 20. Please support this bill to strengthen our State of Texas rights to defend invasion from foreign peoples. Please send HB 7 out of committee for a vote on the floor. Thank you

Carla Palacios
Self, communications coordinator
El Paso, TX

I do not want more of my tax dollars being spent on operation lone star let alone have OLS codified. Have border communities not been through enough?! We have been victims of mass gun violence in El Paso and Uvalde because rhetoric that government programs like OLS spew is anti immigrant and anti Latino. It enables violent vigilantes to take matters in to their own hands and shoot up our communities. OLS sympathizers keep using words like "invasion" and it literally made a Texan like Patrick Crusius drive 10 hours to El Paso to KILL anyone he perceived as "mexican" at a Walmart in 2019 because he wanted to stop the "invasion" as stated in his manifesto. Why do y'all want us killed so badly? This is horrible legislation that cannot be passed, and if it is, it will cause more violence on the border and more blood will be on our governments hands

Melody Allen
self - Logistics Manager
Waxahachie, TX

I am in support of this bill. We need to provide the necessary infrastructure and training to secure our border for all Texans. I greatly appreciate that the Legislature has made this bill a priority.

Mary Smith
Self/retired
Arlington, TX

I am in favor of this bill, HB 7. I feel that it agrees with and strengthens HB 20. Texas has waited too long to take the necessary steps of punishing the illegal activity and now the entire state and surrounding areas are threaten by public health issues.

Fran Rhodes
True Texas Project & self
Fort Worth, TX

True Texas Project supports this bill, although we feel HB20 is the stronger legislation. It is high time something constructive was done about the southern border. It is no longer an immigration issue it is a national and state security issue.

Sylvia Coulson
Self
Waxahachie, TX

I strongly support this bill.

Meredith Gardner
self, non-profit contractor
Round Rock, TX

I am concerned that HB 7 includes no requirement for a bipartisan membership or leadership. This is a missed opportunity for collaboration and is not in the best interest of the public. The bill also opens the door for corruption by allowing private entities to fund research, training, etc. Please do not allow this bill to proceed without correcting for these issues. The people immigrating at the border are just that -- people -- and need to be treated with humanity and respect. This bill would make it harder for our state to do so instead of easier.

Linda Ricks
Self
Midlothian, TX

Please vote “yes” on HB 7 allowing stronger support for our court systems to deal with securing the border. Training border protection personnel and funding border facility infrastructure is necessary in order to protect Texas citizens AS WELL AS assist and protect those who are serving at the borders. Thank you.

Brenda Cash
Republican Women
Shiner, TX

We support this Bill.

Stephanie Taylor
Self
Austin, TX

This bill is not only a waste of state resources, it is illegal. The state will waste hundreds of thousands of dollars on this political stunt. Fund our schools, not Gregg Abbott's political agenda.