November 22, 2016

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson,

It has come to our attention that for calendar year 2017 the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has not requested any flight hours for Operation Phalanx from the Department of Defense (DoD). Given the continuing surge of migrants along the Southern Border beyond FY15 numbers and a large uptick in apprehensions already for the month of November 2016, we believe DHS should be requesting more surveillance and security resources, not less. We request information on what resources DHS will utilize to backfill the gaps this reduction will present.

Given that Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Office of Air and Marine is currently 12 percent below its goal for air interdiction agents this cut in DoD support is extremely imprudent. We expressed concern earlier this year when we were informed that for calendar year 2016 DHS only requested half the normal flight hours from DoD, even though Congress provided full funding for the mission. Taking into account the increase in apprehensions over 2015, DHS heeded our concerns and requested supplemental flight hours in June.

In light of the rise in apprehensions since 2015, the request for supplemental flight hours, and the staffing shortages facing CBP, we request immediate information on the metrics used to determine that a full cut in DoD aerial resources for Operation Phalanx would be sufficient to support our nation's border security efforts.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

John Cornyn
United States Senator

Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas

Henry Cuellar
Member of Congress