

Abbott probes NGOs accused of assisting border crossings

December 19, 2022

In response to a sharp increase in migrants crossing the Texas-Mexico border in the El Paso area, Gov. Greg Abbott is seeking an investigation of nongovernmental organizations he believes may have assisted with illegal border crossings.

Nongovernmental organizations also “may be engaged in unlawfully orchestrating other border crossings through activities on both sides of the border, including in sectors other than El Paso,” Abbott wrote in a [letter to Attorney General Ken Paxton](#).

In the Dec. 14 letter, Abbott called on the attorney general and his office to “initiate an investigation into the role of NGOs in planning and facilitating the illegal transportation of illegal immigrants across our borders.”

He also pledged to work with the attorney general’s office to “craft any sensible legislative solutions ... aimed at solving the ongoing border crisis and the role that NGOs may play in encouraging it.”

Abbott sent the letter one week before the scheduled expiration of Title 42, which allows the United States to expel migrants rapidly from the border without giving them the opportunity to seek asylum. Title 42 first was enacted as part of the Public Health Service Act of 1944 to prevent the spread of communicable disease.

President Donald Trump invoked Title 42 in March 2020 with the expressed intent to stop the spread of COVID-19, and the Biden administration continued it until Dec. 21.

El Paso has experienced a dramatic surge in the number of border crossings prior to the Dec. 21 deadline. On Dec. 17, Mayor Oscar Leeser declared a state of disaster to deal with a humanitarian crisis.

NGOs working with Border Patrol

Stephen Reeves, executive director of Fellowship Southwest, called Abbott's directive to investigate NGOs "an offensive attack on the faith of pastors and churches following the biblical commands to love their neighbor and welcome the stranger."

"While the governor is engaged in political stunts like shipping migrants off to northern cities, and Congress can't get its act together to provide the resources and policy changes necessary to adequately address this humanitarian crisis, it is churches who are taking responsibility to care for the desperate," Reeves said.

Reeves said he does not know of any pastors in the Fellowship Southwest border network—or any other nonprofit—who are "unlawfully orchestrating border crossings."

"What they are doing is feeding and protecting the desperate and vulnerable, many of whom are children, who are forced by our policies to languish in some of the most dangerous cartel-controlled cities in North America," he said.

"Most nonprofits are working with Customs and Border Patrol to try and better control the flow of migrants. I implore the governor to work with the federal government and local officials to coordinate the care of migrants and join us in urging Congress to pass legislation now to address the situation."

Director of Missions Larry Floyd said El Paso Baptist Association's migrant

ministry center operates within the law, working with migrants who have proper documentation. The center works closely with local government, as well as U.S. Border Patrol and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

John Litzler, director of public policy for the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, noted the Baptist General Convention of Texas “is blessed with incredible churches, partners, missionaries and staff who engage in longstanding ministry efforts to meet the spiritual, physical and educational needs of those along the Texas and Mexico border.”

“This ministry is both in harmony with the biblical command to care for the foreigner and love the sojourner, while also within the parameters of and in compliance with local, state and federal law,” Litzler said.

“While we continue to pray for wise and compassionate immigration reform at the federal level, we are also eager to work with Texas legislators to address the border crisis in a way that affirms the God-given value and dignity of migrants to the United States.”

For more information about Texas Baptists’ ministries along the Texas/Mexico border, contact Mario Gonzales with River Ministry/Mexico Missions at (214) 828-5389 or mario.gonzalez@txb.org, or visit txb.org/riverministry.