ACLU of Texas' Astrid Dominguez Testimony to the Texas Senate Finance Committee on Border Militarization and the DPS 'Surge'

My name is Astrid Dominguez from the American Civil Liberties Union of Texas, and I'm here to address widespread concerns regarding the proposed budget for the Department of Public Safety to continue the law enforcement surge at our borders. We call for greater accountability, oversight, and transparency from the Department of Public Safety (DPS), which has received insufficient public scrutiny of its operations and expenditures.

I'm a native of the Rio Grande Valley and I know first-hand a common misperception about the border: what some call lack of security. We have 3100 border patrol agents who are stationed at the border to enforce immigration laws; we also have drones, aerostats and other extensive surveillance technology. Our thriving border communities, which are among the safest in the United States, are already militarized and living there can make us feel second-class. When border residents hear that DPS is requesting more funds to continue the surge, the community's question is: what for? They already perceive their communities as harassed and illegally profiled by the excessive law enforcement presence.

We must require specific metrics for a better analysis of DPS' operations and effectiveness. We should allocate funds and invest in cultural competency training for our agents that would improve community policing in our border regions. At a time when Texas is trying to be cautious about its spending, we ought to make sure that we are allocating our funds in a responsible way, in measures that increase accountability and rebuild community trust, and that permit investment in other more pressing priorities, such as funding child protective services and education. Please don't write border communities off based on unfounded rhetoric: we deserve equal rights and quality of life too. Let's use our resources strategically and start protecting people's rights.

Thank you.