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# MAYOR & COUNCIL MEMORANDUM

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March 19, 2024

Subject: Update on the Southwest Border Region's Provision of Humanitarian Aid to Legally Processed Asylum Seekers (City Wide)

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Issue – Time has been set aside for discussion regarding Southwest Border Region's Provision of Humanitarian Aid to Legally Process Asylum Seekers.

City Manager's Office Recommendation This memo provides an update regarding the Southwest Border Region's coordinated effort to provide humanitarian assistance to legally processed asylum seekers crossing the southern Arizona border and the status of the federal funds used to assist these individuals during their brief time in our community. As stated by County Administrator Jan Leshner at the February 21, 2024 Mayor and Council Study Session, Pima County is estimating that the federal funds used to temporarily house and transport asylum seekers in the Tucson sector will be nearly exhausted by March 31, 2024.

Since the last meeting, Emergency Manager, Savannah Martinez, continues to work diligently with Pima County to develop a series of response plans for expected Street Releases from Border Patrol on April 1. The planning team has expanded to include Pima County Public Health and City of Tucson Public Safety Departments to incorporate their response capabilities. It is important to understand that these plans remain flexible, and fluid given the nature of the situation.

Casa Alitas, an arm of Catholic Community Services and the region's leading nonprofit in this space, has indicated that they will continue their mission to provide services to asylum seekers after April 1, 2024, using private funding much as they did when they began in 2014. This will necessitate a new operational model for Casa Alitas that will significantly reduce their operational capacity, prioritizing service to families with small children. Casa Alitas has indicated that they would like to continue regional partnerships, including with the City and county, to expand services to as many individuals as possible in the absence of federal funding. Staff will continue talks with Casa Alitas to understand their operational capacity moving forward.

Additionally, we continue to work and meet with other community organizations in an attempt to identify areas in which they can play a role and fill the large gaps that will exist on April 1st. The gaps vary and include, but are not limited to, donations management, travel planning assistance, and canteening efforts.

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With 13 days lefts after the March 19 meeting until the end of federal funding, the team continues to explore all options on how to assist legally process asylum seekers while having the least community and fiscal impact. The most likely scenario is that staff will begin by having a no touch approach to street releases while carefully monitoring for humanitarian, public safety, and medical needs. As needed services emerge, staff can work with outside agencies to provide additional services. Per our last Mayor and Council Meeting, I am not recommending at this time that we use City resources to provide operational assistance in this space. After five years of being involved in operational assistance to Casa Alitas, I feel that City staff is familiar with the needs of legally processed asylum seekers and will be able to quickly assess the situation and make adjustments in real time as needed.

As noted in our last meeting, the most viable federal funding to assist asylum seekers is in the FEMA Shelter and Services Program (SSP) money in the Homeland Security Appropriations bill. Arizona Senators Mark Kelly and Kyrsten Sinema sent a letter to House and Senate Appropriations chairs calling for \$752 million in SSP funding to be included in the bill. The bill falls under the new March 22, 2024, deadline. We will bring you information regarding the viability of SSP funding as soon as we have it.

Financial Considerations – None at this time.

Legal Considerations – None at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Ortega", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael J. Ortega, PE  
City Manager

MO: SM:amf  
City Manager's Office