

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 9, 2022

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Yellen:

We write to request that the Department of the Treasury review how the Texas state government, and its agencies are using Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds. On April 29, 2022, Texas Governor Greg Abbott committed to providing another \$500 million to fund Operation Lone Star, his state-run border monitoring program. The program needs additional funding to keep it running through the end of the fiscal year. According to Abbott, the funding will be taken from the budgets of Texas agencies, including the Department of State Health Services, Health and Human Services Commission, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and Juvenile Justice Department. We ask that this review be conducted to determine if Governor Abbott is diverting pandemic relief funds to provide the additional support for Operation Lone Star.¹

In November 2021, Governor Abbot signed Senate Bill 8 into law, allocating nearly \$16 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) toward various state resources and programs.² Senate Bill 8 already committed this funding to several agencies and programs. The Department of State Health Services received over \$2 billion, the Health and Human Services Commission received around \$378 million, and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice received \$360 million.³ We are now concerned that this relief funding will be misappropriated to support the failed Operation Lone Star program.

As you have stated in your agency's Final Rule for the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, the funding should be used to replace lost public sector revenue due to the pandemic, respond to the far-reaching public health and negative economic impacts of the pandemic, provide premium pay for essential workers, and invest in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.⁴ Instead, Governor Abbott is taking this funding away from integral public sector resources and allocating it to Operation Lone Star, which the Texas Legislature has already funded with almost \$2 billion toward border security over the next two years. It is negligent and

¹ <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/04/29/greg-abbott-texas-border-mission-funding/>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/dfw/news/gov-greg-abbott-signs-bill-federal-covid-19-relief-funds-texans/>

³ <https://www.county.org/TAC/media/TACMedia/News/County-Issues/2021/Final-Version-of-SB-8.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2022-01-27/pdf/2022-00292.pdf>

irresponsible for Governor Abbot to direct additional funding to Operation Lone Star, especially if the funding in question was intended to help Texans rebuild from the pandemic.⁵

To date, Operation Lone Star has hampered Texas's economic recovery from the pandemic and caused significant harm to Texas National Guard members and their families. The impacts of this failed program include:

- Hampering border commerce with duplicative border inspections, causing \$4.2 billion in economic damage to the state of Texas⁶
- Wasting personnel resources and taxpayer dollars, especially since there is a focus on arresting asylum-seekers for misdemeanor trespassing charges. The federal government already has 23,000 agents and officers stationed along the U.S. border with Mexico, more than twice as many as last year,⁷
- Forcing up to 10,000 National Guard and 1,000 Texas Department of Public Safety Personnel to leave their civilian jobs and families for border deployments, where they face abysmal working conditions.⁸
 - National Guard members are not eligible for Veterans Administration (VA) healthcare or disability benefits for injuries or deaths incurred as a result of Operation Lone Star. Guard members deployed by state governors receive state workers compensation death benefits, which amount to just a fraction of the benefits they would receive if deployed under federal authority.⁹
 - Two soldiers assigned to Operation Lone Star have already died on duty¹⁰
 - Soldiers have attempted suicide,¹¹ and one soldier drowned trying to save migrants because he wasn't equipped with a flotation device,¹²
 - Soldiers lack sufficient equipment due to the hastily deployed border mission,¹³
 - There have been several pay issues, meaning that many soldiers were on guard for weeks before receiving their paychecks.

As you continue your oversight of the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds, we urge you to ensure all states are using these crucial funds for the reasons they were meant to be used. Texas has struggled immensely during the pandemic, and these funds are critical to help our state

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2022/05/06/texas-coronavirus-stimulus-immigration-border/>

⁶ <https://theweek.com/greg-abbott/1013145/texas-gov-abbotts-border-inspections-prompt-mexico-to-move-lucrative-trade-link>

⁷ <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/texas/article/As-injuries-climb-National-Guard-troops-on-Texas-17141367.php>

⁸ <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/03/30/operation-lone-star-texas-explained/>

⁹ <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2021/10/26/texas-slashes-guard-benefits-while-spending-millions-to-expand-border-mission/>

¹⁰ <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/texas/article/As-injuries-climb-National-Guard-troops-on-Texas-17141367.php>

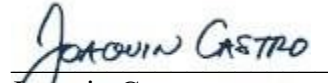
¹¹ <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/01/13/suicide-attempts-delayed-pay-prompt-calls-for-probe-into-guards-texas-mission/>

¹² <https://www.khou.com/article/news/local/texas/texas-soldier-drowned-no-flotation-device/285-55f07cfa-a2bb-4919-be80-5cf59ec8a6d4>

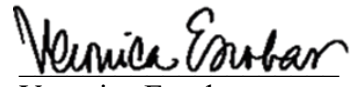
¹³ <https://www.khou.com/article/news/local/texas/texas-soldier-drowned-no-flotation-device/285-55f07cfa-a2bb-4919-be80-5cf59ec8a6d4>

recover from the devastation of the past two years. Governor Abbott must not be allowed to use federal coronavirus relief funds to further his political theater at the expense of Texas families.

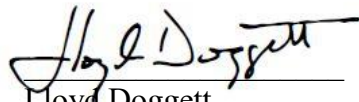
Sincerely,



Joaquin Castro
Member of Congress




Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress




Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress



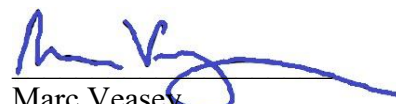
Colin Allred
Member of Congress



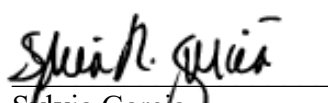
Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Al Green
Member of Congress



Marc Veasey
Member of Congress



Sylvia Garcia
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lizzie Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line through the middle of the name.

Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress