



MEMORANDUM

Date: April 23, 2019

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **County Response to Community Request for Assistance with Temporary Shelter and Care of Asylum Seekers brought to Pima County by the Federal Government**

As you are all aware, the Department of Homeland Security (DOHS) for the past year or so has been bringing to Pima County people seeking asylum in the United States. Since January 2019, DOHS has brought more than 7,000 asylum seekers to Tucson. On average, asylum seekers only spend about 3 days in Tucson before leaving for other locations (see the attachment identifying the primary final location of 159 asylum seekers on a particular day). DOHS continues to bring new asylum seekers on a daily basis. Recently, DOHS has been dropping off as many as 200 people a day. It should be noted these individuals possess a valid "Order of Release on Recognizance" that allows them to remain in the United States, pending court action on their asylum claim; hence, they are not in the country illegally.

Catholic Community Services (CCS) and a host of other organizations and volunteers have been providing shelter, food, basic health screenings and travel aid, but the nonprofit community's ability to provide these services is at capacity and has asked local governments to assist.

In processing these asylum seekers, most of whom are women and children, DOHS takes most of their belongings, clothing, medications and even their shoelaces. If not for CCS, the other nonprofits and a host of volunteers, it is likely we would have had a significant humanitarian issue that would have required some kind of County response before today.

The temporary shelter set up by CCS, the old Benedictine Monastery on Country Club Road, is at capacity. It is also an old facility not built to serve as a long-term transitional shelter for this population. Most notably, its bathroom facilities are beginning to fail, causing backups that limit the use of some parts of the building. Moreover, the owner of the Monastery, who has been enormously generous in allowing the large complex to be used as a shelter, has development plans for the property. Long-term use was not envisioned when the facility was offered as a temporary shelter site. Therefore, use of the facility will come to an end this summer. A new process center and shelter will be needed soon. Additionally, the relentless flow of refugees through the Monastery has exhausted many of the volunteers providing aid. A sudden surge in the number of refugees being brought to Tucson has pushed the volunteers to their limits.

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The City of Tucson last week opened a facility to help CCS with processing the asylum seekers but City assistance is only temporary and they are in the process of standing down that shelter. Because both the Monastery and the City's El Pueblo Center were at capacity, I authorized a temporary facility be opened at the Kino Event Center, formerly the Mulcahy YMCA, during the Easter weekend to assist with the shelter effort. This temporary shelter has been in operation since the evening of April 19, 2019. So far, the Stadium District, Parks and Recreation, Health, Fleet Services, Office of Emergency Management, Sheriff, Juvenile and Superior Court have been involved in this temporary response. The Event Center is currently undergoing renovations on a number of interior spaces; reserved use of the facility has been on a limited basis, with primarily smaller events held on the weekends when construction work is not taking place. Thus, utilizing the Event Center as a temporary shelter for this effort was an appropriate use of the space in its as-is condition.

Because the flow of asylum seekers has not abated and present shelters are at capacity. I have authorized County staff to aid the community response to these asylum seekers at Kino for at least the next 10 days. During that time, the County will do the following:

- County Public Works and Facilities Management staff will assess the Benedictine Monastery's physical condition and determine what temporary repairs can be made to keep the facility in operation, primarily to prevent the discharge of human waste from the public sewer system and hence avoid federal and state permit water quality violations.
- County Administration will seek from CCS a full list of its logistical, administrative and staffing needs for the long-term and look for areas both short and long term that are appropriate for County assistance.
- County Administration will work with the City of Tucson Office of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, the emergency response nonprofit community, faith-based organizations and others, to find a new shelter to replace the Monastery if it physically fails or after it is no longer available for use.
- The County's Faith-based Initiatives staff will begin earnestly recruiting faith organizations not already involved to assist in the aid effort.
- The County's Office of Emergency Management will contact the Arizona Department of Emergency and Military Affairs to determine if state assistance will be forthcoming to border counties dealing with this problem.

Our efforts are primarily related to preventing the spread of infectious diseases and preventing abandoned asylum seekers from becoming involved in our criminal justice system through vagrancy. These primary public health and safety reasons justify our actions identified previously.

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Based on a Grant Programs Directorate Information Bulletin No. 436, issued November 27, 2018 by the US Department of Homeland Security and FEMA, we intend to apply for an Operation Stonegarden Grant for Unaccompanied Children and Families on the Southwest Border. The Information Bulletin allows for grant funding related to reimbursement of costs related to providing humanitarian relief. These allowable costs include costs for food, water, hygiene products, medicine, medical supplies and temporary housing as well as costs for transportation to and from temporary housing or to permanent housing.

The States that are eligible as recipients or subrecipients are Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas. Those choosing to use funds in this manner must also collaborate on reprioritizing Operation Stonegarden funds for the provision of humanitarian relief through Operations Orders approved by the US Border Patrol sector, US Border Patrol Headquarters, and FEMA Grant Programs Directorate.

We are now in the process of determining appropriate costs for reimbursement for the humanitarian aid that is now being provided through Catholic Community Services and now, because of overflow conditions, by others.

I hope to have clear guidance on grant application and processing within the next 24 hours.

CHH/mp

Attachment

c: Jan Leshar, Chief Deputy County Administrator
Tom Burke, Deputy County Administrator for Administration
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator for Public Works
Dr. Francisco Garcia, Assistant County Administrator for Community and Health Services
Teresa Bravo, Economic Development International Coordinator
Spencer Graves, Program Manager
Michael J. Ortega, P.E. City Manager

