



## FACT SHEET

### Operation Lone Star: Governor Abbott’s Racist and Cruel Effort to Jail Immigrants at a Mass Scale

The Lone Star Program is a multi-million dollar Texas law enforcement operation designed by Governor Greg Abbott to criminally prosecute and rapidly deport immigrants by targeting suspected migrants for arrest, prosecution, and incarceration on Texas low-level state misdemeanor offenses. Reports of the first convictions are alarming. Horrific videos posted by one county sheriff show individuals herded into mass hearings in parking lots.<sup>1</sup> Dozens have already been convicted and served 15 days in jail for “enhanced” trespassing.<sup>2</sup> More than 400 people are currently detained pretrial in a state prison, many without access to counsel.

Governor Abbott has been open about Lone Star’s mission: use local and state law enforcement to create a new class of “criminal aliens” that can be deported quickly and prevent their return.<sup>3</sup> In other words, Governor Abbott built his own state deportation force and is using state funds to power it. He plans to keep this operation running for years<sup>4</sup> and is now seeking almost \$2 billion from the state legislature to sustain and expand Lone Star. The Lone Star Program exploits the Texas legal system to reach Governor Abbott’s singular goal of stopping immigrants from entering and living in Texas by any means. It is designed to trigger deportation and criminalize Latinx and immigrant communities.

Some critical facts we have learned about Lone Star:

- Gov. Abbott has deployed around [one thousand](#) Texas troopers, National Guard Members,<sup>5</sup> and state troopers from Iowa, Florida, Idaho, Arkansas, Nebraska, Ohio, and South Dakota to patrol,

<sup>1</sup> Facebook page for Kinney County Sheriff. <https://fb.watch/7vIBWOVpu5/>.

<sup>2</sup> “Gov. Greg Abbott’s border security initiative rolls out with confusion, missteps and a whole lot of state troopers in Val Verde County,” Jolie McCullough, Texas Tribune, July 30, 2021. <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/07/30/texas-greg-abbott-border-security/>.

<sup>3</sup> During a town hall held by the LaSalle County Sheriff’s Office with ranchers and residents, officials stated the most “effective” way to ensure migrants are deported quickly is to ensure they are convicted with a crime. The audience was instructed in documenting property damage to transform a crime from a misdemeanor to a felony. See Facebook page for LaSalle County Sheriff’s Office, [https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?extid=NS-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOUS\\_GK0T-GK1C&v=360527495676020&ref=watch\\_permalink](https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?extid=NS-UNK-UNK-UNK-IOUS_GK0T-GK1C&v=360527495676020&ref=watch_permalink).

<sup>4</sup> Delegates report Texas troopers reported they have contracts with local hotels for the next two and half years to carry out this operation.

<sup>5</sup> Some of these National Guard members have been removed from community posts: in El Paso, it caused a food pantry to shut down. Abbott pulls National Guard from El Paso food bank for border enforcement efforts, official says, Danielle Prokop, El Paso Matters, Aug. 24, 2021. <https://elpasomatters.org/2021/08/24/abbott-pulls-national-guard-from-el-paso-food-bank-for-border-enforcement-efforts-official-says/>.

investigate, and police the Southern border.<sup>6</sup> Both Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds provided planes, boats, and state personnel to aid Texas authorities, all of whom operate under the authority of the Texas Department of Public Safety.<sup>7</sup> Residents have experienced increased criminalization as a result of heavy DPS presence.<sup>8</sup> These actions raise serious concerns about the violation of core pre-emption principles and the risk of rampant racial profiling of Latinx community members.

- Lone Star has resulted in mass targeting of migrants through state courts, already subjecting hundreds to mass arrest and prosecution, with the first charges filed, arraignments, and pleas of dozens in the last two weeks.<sup>9</sup> There are disturbing reports of civil rights abuses in these prosecutions. Detained migrants are extremely confused by the process and our local court and criminal defense systems. People do not understand what they were being charged with, the consequences of these charges, or their right to an attorney. Bail amounts are unaffordable and reach \$10,000. In one jurisdiction, Kinney County, the Sheriff's Department organized magistrations hearings in the parking lot.<sup>10</sup> They distributed pre-filled forms in English which they told migrants to sign and which purported to waive core constitutional rights, with one pre-filled box saying that the person charged declined to request counsel. The mass processing in Operation Lone Star resembles Operation Streamline, the infamous federal prosecution program, and strains Texas' legal system, where local courts do not have capacity for these cases and counties have already overloaded defender resources.<sup>11</sup>
- The Governor has designated the Dolph Briscoe Unit, the notorious 1,000 bed Texas prison, as the facility to incarcerate individuals prosecuted under Operation Lone Star, and is seeking to use other state prisons. Hundreds of migrants have already been transferred into the Briscoe State Prison, a facility with numerous reports of inhumane conditions.<sup>12</sup> This prison is being used to incarcerate people *pre-trial for misdemeanor offenses*, and continues to incarcerate around 200 people who have been convicted of felony offenses, a decision that is unprecedented in Texas and other states.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kim Reynolds says sending Iowa state troopers to US-Mexico border was 'the right thing to do'

Stephen Gruber-Miller, Des Moines Register, July 28, 2021,

<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/2021/07/28/governor-kim-reynolds-iowa-state-patrol-deployed-texas-mexico-border-immigration/8056750002/>; "DeSantis will send 50 state police officers to assist Texas on the southern border," Jim Little, Pensacola News Journal, June 25, 2021.

<https://www.pnj.com/story/news/2021/06/25/desantis-send-50-florida-officers-help-texas-southern-border/5344834001/>.

<sup>7</sup> Texas Department of Public Safety explains Iowa troopers' mission at the border, Sara Beckman, We Are Iowa, July 19, 2021.

<https://www.weareiowa.com/article/news/local/iowa-state-patrol-us-mexico-border-texas-department-of-public-safety-del-rio/524-32d04417-cdcd-4305-a2b6-dd91e2d92c18>.

<sup>8</sup> Tanvia Varma, "Increase in DPS Troopers causes concern for some Starr County residents," KRGV 5, <https://www.krgv.com/news/increase-in-dps-troopers-causes-concern-for-some-starr-county-residents> (arrests and citations are up 70% since increased DPS presence and residents are fearful of driving).

<sup>9</sup> Texas releases migrant from new jail, doesn't know what to do with him, August 18, 2021, AttorneyMotionNews,

<https://attorneymotionnews.com/2021/08/18/texas-releases-migrant-from-new-jail-doesnt-know-what-to-do-with-him/>.

<sup>10</sup> Facebook page for Kinney County Sheriff. <https://fb.watch/7vIBWOVpu5/>.

<sup>11</sup> "How judicial conflicts of interest are denying poor Texans their right to an effective lawyer," Neena Satija, Texas Tribune, August 19, 2019; <https://www.texastribune.org/2019/08/19/unchecked-power-texas-judges-indigent-defense/>.

<sup>12</sup> Jolie McCullough, "Almost 150 guards are staffing an empty Texas prison as state officials work on Gov. Greg Abbott's plan to use it for immigrants," Texas Tribune, July 8, 2021, <https://www.texastribune.org/2021/07/08/texas-immigration-prison-empty/>

<sup>13</sup> "Gov. Abbott Orders South Texas Prison To Make Room For Undocumented Immigrants, TDCJ Says," Houston Public News Media.

<https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/politics/immigration/2021/06/17/400934/gov-abbot-orders-south-texas-prison-to-house-undocumented-immigrants-tdcj-says/>.

- Immigration and Customs Enforcement is participating in Lone Star's operations by treating individuals processed through Lone Star as priorities for deportation. They will also transfer people from Briscoe to ICE. The local ICE field office has indicated that an individual prosecuted through Lone Star could be treated as a priority for deportation under the current enforcement priorities memorandum (e.g. recent entry) and will be coordinating transfers from Briscoe prison to ICE.

Lone Star echoes the decades-old racist tactics of Arizona's Maricopa County former Sheriff Joe Arpaio and county attorney Bill Montgomery in which thousands of immigrants were prosecuted for employment irregularities to trigger deportation.<sup>14</sup> However, Governor Abbott has gone far beyond Sheriff Arpaio by conscripting out-of-state law enforcement to help Texas facilitate prosecutions and deportations, prosecuting individuals en masse, and using the massive arsenal of state resources (for example, DPS, the court system, state prisons, and hundreds of million—possibly soon to be billions—in state funds) to create and grow this statewide operation. Families across the country will face impoverishment as they try to seek information and/or hire criminal defense and immigration counsel.

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<sup>14</sup> 10 Key Findings From The Civil Contempt Ruling Against Sheriff Joe Arpaio, Jude Joffe-Block, May 2, 2016, Kjzz 91.5FM; <https://kjzz.org/content/308856/10-key-findings-civil-contempt-ruling-against-sheriff-joe-arpaio>.