



# AMERICAN GATEWAYS

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

July 2022

## A Letter From Co-Executive Director Rebecca Lightsey

Once again, we saw tragedy as a result of inaction on national immigration reform, with the trailer tragedy in San Antonio where 53 migrants who were trapped inside a tractor trailer died. Although we at American Gateways can't single-handedly spur the needed immigration reform, we can - and are - doing our part for more humane immigration services. Here are a few actions we've done this month:

- We have spoken out on the need for reform; you can read Edna Yang's op-ed below
- We are meeting with the survivors of the tractor-trailer tragedy to educate them about their legal rights and options and to provide them with the legal representation they need
- We joined SA Stands and other colleagues in San Antonio to encourage the Bexar County Commissioners to fund legal immigration services - and they did!

The Bexar County Commissioners Court made a [historic decision](#) last week when they created a \$1 million legal immigration defense fund. The decision, led by Commissioner Justin Rodriguez, recognizes the critical importance of legal assistance to immigrants in legal proceedings. We applaud the

Commissioner Court for this critical initiative.



Finally, this young philanthropist raised nearly \$300 to support American Gateways through a bake sale at her neighborhood pool. We are so grateful for our community!

Stay cool and thanks as always for your support.



## **Goodbye to This Years AmeriCorps VISTAs**

As many of you know, we rely heavily on our incredible volunteers to support our work. This past year we were grateful to have the help of two AmeriCorps VISTAs, Allison Tinglov and Haley Galliano. AmeriCorps VISTAs assist with capacity building and sustainability of non-profit organizations all across the US. We're grateful Allison and Haley chose American Gateways for their year of service and wish them the best in their future endeavors.

We're seeking two new members for our third and final year hosting VISTAs, if you or someone you know is interested in applying, please check out our [website](#).



## Editorial: A deadly San Antonio crime scene refutes the open border lie

[Austin American-Statesman](#)

San Antonio police had barely finished counting dead bodies after the grisly discovery of dozens of migrants in the back of a scorching tractor-trailer late last month when Gov. Greg Abbott blamed the White House.

“These deaths are on Biden,” Abbott tweeted in response to the deadliest human smuggling case in U.S. history, in which 53 people lost their lives. “They are a result of his deadly open border policies. They show the deadly consequences of his refusal to enforce the law.”

Abbott’s crassly political finger-pointing about open borders was patently false, disproven by the very crime scene he tweeted about. After all, if the United States had open borders that migrants could easily waltz across, why would they pay smugglers exorbitant sums to hide and transport them in a potential death trap with no ventilation or air conditioning?

The truth is U.S. borders are heavily guarded, with billions spent every year on manpower and technology to keep unauthorized immigrants out. The federal government and the state of Texas have adopted increasingly punitive policies that put migrants at greater risk. The U.S. for example has made it harder for



those fleeing violence in places like Guatemala and Honduras to ask for asylum, a right available to them under the law. When they arrive at the border to make an asylum request, they're either forced to wait in detention for an average of almost four months or forced to remain in Mexico, where they are preyed upon by dangerous cartels. Meanwhile, American businesses are desperate to fill open jobs that some migrants would gratefully accept.

On Thursday, Abbott announced that Texas law enforcement would begin returning unauthorized migrants to the border, though immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility.

Increasingly restrictive border policies are driving desperate migrants to risk their lives to enter the U.S. illegally. In the years since Trump imposed new hardline immigration policies that Biden has been unable or unwilling to unwind, migrants have perished at the U.S.-Mexico border at alarmingly high rates, usually by drowning, dehydration, exposure, or falls from border walls. CNN reported that the U.S. Border Patrol discovered the remains of a record 557 migrants at or near the border in 2021, more than twice the number found in 2020. The number could climb higher this year.

**"I would hope that leadership in our state and in our country would look at immigration from a human point of view; look at what our laws currently are and why they're not working," Edna Yang, co-executive director of American Gateways, an immigration policy reform group in Texas, told our editorial board last week. "We have a system that creates backlogs (in immigration applications and court hearings) and doesn't adjudicate justice or give due process."**

A Trump-era policy that forces migrants to remain in Mexico, often in squalid border camps, while their asylum claims are processed in U.S. courts has led some who would normally be admitted into the country while their cases are sorted out to try to enter the U.S. illegally. The U.S. Supreme Court on June 30 upheld the Biden administration's decision to rescind this inhumane policy. However, the justices asked a lower court to rule on its merits under administrative law, so the dispute isn't settled.

Meanwhile, Title 42, a Trump White House pandemic-era policy that allows for rapid expulsion of migrants at the U.S. border based on concerns about

COVID-19, is driving some without other options to risk trying to enter illegally again. Biden tried to end Title 42 but a federal judge blocked the move. Denise Gilman, director of the Texas Law Immigration Clinic, told our board that policy makers could spend tax dollars more wisely and save migrant lives by taking a more humane approach at the border.

"Don't put (migrants) into expedited removal where they're put in detention or forced to undergo initial screening interviews that assume that they're not viable asylum seekers," Gilman said. "Go the exact opposite route and assume they're asylum seekers, let them go live with families...and put the resources into processing those claims and get people integrated."

The United States has every obligation to police its borders, but it should do so with compassion and humanity. Texas and the nation's border states don't need political opportunism and finger-pointing. They need sensible immigration policies that recognize the humanity of the migrants who come here seeking jobs and allow them opportunities to come here legally. Providing these avenues would save lives and bolster a U.S. economy in dire need of workers while honoring the principles of acceptance and inclusion to which this country aspires.

