



EVERY TEXAN

Formerly Center for Public Policy Priorities

Testimony on Operation Lone Star

Jaime Puente, Immigration and K-12 Policy Analyst

puente@everytexan.org

July 12, 2022

Operation Lone Star (OLS) is neither efficient nor effective public policy. Continuing to fund OLS hurts all Texans, white, black, and brown, by wasting \$4 billion on failed deterrence policies instead of using this general revenue to address critical issues facing the state such as the ongoing risk to kids in the foster care system, the inability to prevent gun violence, or the post-pandemic crises facing [teachers](#) and [students](#).

OLS is Not Efficient

Not only does the effort cost over \$20 million per week, [contracts are uncompetitive](#) and provide little oversight protecting the interest of Texans, a risk that should raise flags for any appropriating body. Governmental best practices such as a competitive bid process are critical to preventing fraud and abuse, especially when expenditures are so enormous. The lack of oversight for so-called border security efforts may seem routine, but the Governor's office, Department of Public Safety, and other state agencies owe Texans a detailed accounting of the program's contracting and procurement practices.

Aside from contracting, Operation Lone Star provides many examples of state money being used in ways that are at best inefficient and at worst a multi-billion dollar boondoggle. For example, OLS funds have paid for [duplicative](#) patrolling efforts of [private land](#) and for grants to counties engaged in extra-legal activities such as [deporting detainees](#) and partnering with a [known white nationalist militia](#). Texans deserve to know if the hap hazard deployment of state resources at such a large scale allowed these and other abuses. At the very least, all Texans – black, brown, or white – deserve to know if valuable COVID relief dollars have been wasted.

OLS is Not Effective

The only thing effective about deterrence policies like OLS is how effectively [deadly they are](#). The circular logic used to justify and defend OLS are completely flawed. The Governor claims OLS is working because there's fentanyl and immigrants are being detained. Yet, OLS is also not working and the border is still "insecure" because fentanyl is being interceded and immigrants are being detained. Most of the fentanyl, however, is seized outside of DPS border regions.

The best answers the Governor and the Department of Public Safety give Texans who ask for accountability is "trust us" followed by a request for more money and resources. While state

leaders obfuscate on accountability, more than [650 aspiring Americans](#) died crossing the U.S.-Mexico border last year. In Texas, the [Annette Straus Institute](#) counted more than 1,519 people dying in South Texas between 2012 and 2019. The 53 people who died roasting in a box truck outside of San Antonio recently are in addition to the [93 deaths already reported for 2022](#), and the heat is just getting settled in for summer. Our policies as a state and nation, still based on centuries old “replacement” theories, prioritize complete deterrence rather than meeting people with compassion, humanity, and basic human decency. Texans are decent people, but our state policy lacks decency toward the least of our brethren. No room at our inn, and no food nor welcome to the strangers among us.

What we do know about Operation Lone Star, like Gate Keeper and Hold the Line before it: while they utterly fail to prevent people from finding new ways to migrate, the policy is very successful at funneling people into situations where desire for opportunity ends in [permanent injury or death](#). Migration is a human right that people will continue to use as they [seek opportunity](#) for themselves and their families, no matter the cruelties and horrors we may create. Failed deterrence policies rob Texans of opportunities to harness the [economic](#), [cultural](#), and [social benefits](#) immigrants have provided Texas and the U.S. for generations.

Policies such as Operation Lone Star divert critical resources from struggling state services. Instead of playing shell games with 4 billion Texan dollars, the Governor could have tried to help foster kids suffering in our care. The Governor could have funded health care for Texans – mothers, fathers, and families. And, the Governor could have funded resources for teachers and students struggling to recover from two years of isolated learning or those still suffering from the massacre in Uvalde. But instead, we have Operation Lone Star, an indefinite, unchecked, and wholly unsuccessful waste of vital Texas resources.