



Hidalgo County Commissioners Court

Richard F. Cortez
County Judge

David L. Fuentes
Commissioner, Precinct 1

Eduardo "Eddie" Cantu
Commissioner, Precinct 2

Everardo "Ever" Villarreal
Commissioner, Precinct 3

Ellie Torres
Commissioner, Precinct 4

OFFICE OF COUNTY JUDGE RICHARD F. CORTEZ

Public Affairs Division

100 E. Cano St., 1st Floor
(956) 292-7026 P
(956) 292-7766 F
www.co.hidalgo.tx.us W
Public.Info@co.hidalgo.tx.us E

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Hidalgo County Judge declares local state of disaster because of growing numbers of migrants seeking asylum

EDINBURG – Hidalgo County Judge Richard F. Cortez on Monday signed a local state of disaster because of the growing threat of COVID-19 that may be present among the ongoing surge of migrants seeking asylum and being released in Hidalgo County. The declaration is effective immediately and remains in effect for seven days. The Hidalgo County Commissioners Court must vote to extend the disaster after seven days.

The two-page declaration, which declares that "U.S. Customs and Border Protection is releasing an alarmingly substantial number of immigrants into the City of McAllen," is different from the disaster proclamation issued by Governor Greg Abbott on May 31, 2021.

Governor's Abbott's declaration targets those illegally entering the United States and trying to remain in the country without authorization.

Judge Cortez' declaration on Monday focuses on the large numbers of migrants who are legally in this country after having applied for asylum and getting permission by federal officials to remain in the United States until their asylum claims are heard in immigration courts.

"The current situation can be confusing because of the complexity of existing immigration laws," Judge Cortez said. "My order today is targeting those migrants who are legally in this country seeking asylum, but are being released by immigration officials in high volumes while the spread of COVID-19 is spiking within our community."

The order notes that nonprofit agencies and the City of McAllen are being overwhelmed by the continued influx of these asylum-seeking migrants and can "no longer adequately feed, house, provide medical attention or otherwise accommodate" these migrants.

At the same time, Hidalgo County is seeing a spike in COVID-19 cases and now has a hospitalization rate in excess of 18 percent. Governor Abbott has declared that a rate in excess of 15 percent is considered a high hospitalization rate.

"My order declares that extraordinary measures must be taken," Cortez said. A local disaster declaration is the first step in securing additional resources to address the disaster, including potential reimbursement from state and federal authorities.

"We must change current immigration laws and existing policies to slow the volume of migrants seeking asylum," Cortez said. "Until those laws and policies are changed, we must increase local capacity to safely accommodate these migrants legally seeking asylum."

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Hidalgo County is home to one of the fastest growing regions in the nation. We provide health and justice to the over 800,000 residents of our county. We strive to be accessible and responsive to our citizens by providing excellent public service through the values of leadership, transparency, fairness, collaboration, respect and fiscal responsibility. Follow our social media feed at www.co.hidalgo.tx.us/followus