

# SEPARATE & DEADLY

SEGREGATION OF 911  
EMERGENCY SERVICES  
IN THE ARIZONA BORDERLANDS



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# SEPARATE & DEADLY

## SEGREGATION OF 911 EMERGENCY SERVICES IN THE ARIZONA BORDERLANDS

“The Search and Rescue Unit shall conduct a search when there is sufficient cause to believe that anyone is lost, injured, stranded, or deceased in a remote and normally inaccessible area.”

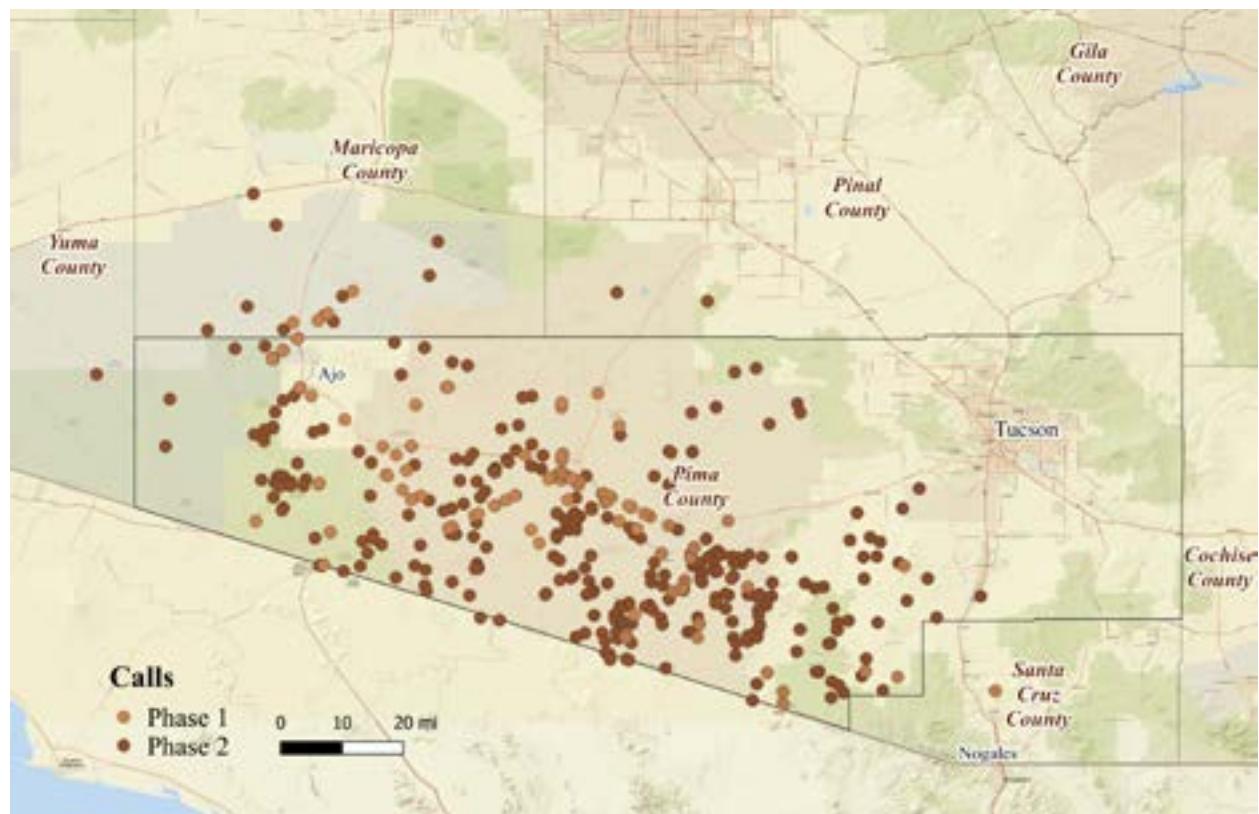
—Pima County Sheriff’s Department Policy Manual

“Did you guys ask them if they’re illegal, cause we don’t go search for the illegals.”

—Pima County Sheriff’s Office 911 Dispatcher

**O**n February 16, 2023, a young man from Guatemala named Martín was experiencing chest pain while crossing the southern US border on foot through the Sonoran Desert. He was stranded and alone in the remote Baboquivari Mountains of Pima County, Arizona. Seeking emergency rescue, Martín called 911 eleven times over the course of three days. Martín’s family and local humanitarian groups also repeatedly contacted 911 to advocate for his rescue, providing Pima County dispatchers with his exact location via GPS coordinates, as well as a copy of Martín’s ID and cell phone number. As is standard practice in Pima County, 911 dispatchers forwarded all of these distress calls to the US Border Patrol. The federal agents instructed Martín to remain in place to await rescue, but no Border Patrol agents or government rescuers ever arrived to save his life.

Martín spent three of the coldest nights of the year on the mountain, with only a trash bag for shelter. He suffered from lack of food, water, and protection from the elements. He was having difficulty standing and walking. After two days attempting to confirm whether Border Patrol or county search and rescue services were going to mobilize to save Martín’s life, local humanitarian volunteers hiked into the rugged mountains and found Martín themselves. Had these civilian groups not responded to his distress calls, there is every reason to believe that Martín would not have survived. While the team of volunteers worked to bring Martín down the mountain, Border Patrol Agents Brummel (a trained EMT) and Rizzo sat in their patrol truck on the roadside below. The agents took Martín’s vitals on the side of a dirt road by flashlight. They denied him any access to further medical care, and instead immediately arrested and processed him for deportation.<sup>1</sup>



Map of 911 calls received by Pima County Sheriff's Department, 2016-2018. Credit: Sam Chambers.

As is common practice in the Arizona borderlands, Pima County 911 dispatchers transferred Martín’s call to Border Patrol without any followup, and without initiating any county search effort. Border Patrol did not rescue him, despite having precise GPS coordinates of his location. Fortunately, Martín was also able to make a phone call to his family before losing cell-phone battery or service. His family, in turn, was able to find and contact a small humanitarian volunteer organization. These volunteers, though they lacked the personnel and resources of either the Pima County Sheriff’s Department or Border Patrol, were nevertheless able to respond and locate Martín. This, however, is not the outcome for many of the hundreds of migrating people who contact 911 in need of rescue every year.

In this report, we examine the complicity of local, county-level law enforcement agencies and emergency services in exacerbating a crisis of mass death and disappearance caused by federal border policies. As the first point of contact in a life-or-death emergency, county-level conduct is pivotal to determining the fate of undocumented callers. We will share findings from our review of over two thousand 911 calls handled by the Pima County Sheriff’s Department [PCSD]. These call recordings evidence a troubling pattern of unconstitutional and abusive practices that directly contribute to the ongoing humanitarian crisis at the border.

As one of the largest and most dangerous migration corridors in the US borderlands, Arizona’s Pima County represents a critical case study for examining the disastrous impacts of segregating emergency response systems.<sup>2</sup> The southwest border county lines 387 miles of the present-day divide between the US and Mexico and extends approximately 80 miles into the US interior. Within this 9,000-mile jurisdiction, emergency services are in high demand: Border Patrol’s enforcement strategy of [Prevention Through Deterrence](#) intentionally funnels people crossing the border away from urban areas and ports of entry, and into some of the most remote and deadly regions of the United States. Everyday, migrating people who have already crossed onto US soil risk their lives in this vast expanse of desert. Pima County alone sees approximately 50% of known immigration-related deaths in the US—nearly 4,000 recorded fatalities and thousands more missing persons cases. Border-wide, the remains of at least 10,000 migrating people have been recovered inside the United States, with countless more people disappeared by federal immigration policy, meaning they are never located alive, nor are their bodies ever recovered and/or identified.

A growing number of people crossing the US-Mexico borderlands have access to a cell phone, cell reception, and enough battery life to place a 911 call. Pima County 911 dispatchers handle approximately 1,500 such distress calls annually (an average of 4-5 every day). The response of local authorities is separate and unequal: whereas county-led search, rescue, and medical services respond to reports of US citizens and foreign tourists in distress in their jurisdiction, they almost never deploy a response for people who they suspect have crossed the border. Instead, 911 dispatchers refer all calls from migrating people, or people they profile as migrants, to Border Patrol.

Our [previous report](#), *Left to Die: Border Patrol, Search and Rescue, and the Crisis of Disappearance*, found that Border Patrol does not reliably respond to life-threatening

emergencies involving undocumented people. In 63% of the cases we reviewed, the border enforcement agency took no action whatsoever to search for migrating people in distress. In the few cases in which Border Patrol did deploy a confirmed response, 10% ended in the known death of the person in distress. Another 17% of searches resulted in disappearance, meaning the lost person was never rescued, nor were their remains ever recovered or identified. Comparing these statistics with the near-100% success rate of county-led search and rescues in Pima County, it becomes clear that the bifurcation of emergency services along citizenship lines constitutes a form of deadly discrimination.

In this report, we first examine the system used by 911 dispatchers to profile callers and determine their immigration status, and how this determination influences the quality of response the callers receive. We examine how dispatchers calls from people crossing the border at the first point of contact. We show how, from the outset, these calls are not treated with the same seriousness, thoroughness, or professionalism as calls from English-speakers presumed to be US citizens. We show that this carelessness can seriously diminish the likelihood that a lost person will be rescued.

Next, we look at the Pima County Search and Rescue (SAR) unit's history of denying any responsibility or accountability for the outcomes of these cases. Through an analysis of 911 calls and incident reports from 2022, we show that even when the Pima County Sheriff's SAR team is aware of Border Patrol's failure to rescue a lost person within their jurisdiction, in the majority of cases they still do not respond, refuting the agency's claim that the only reason for their lack of response is that Border Patrol is able to respond more quickly.

Next, we look at Border Patrol's infiltration of Emergency Medical Services, showing how the enforcement agency has inserted itself into every level of emergency response in the borderlands, compromising the quality of medical care received by migrants as well as

violating basic medical ethics. Finally, we detail our demands and recommendations for improving emergency response and addressing the crisis of death and disappearance in Pima County and border-wide.

## DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

To evidence the scope and impact of 911 segregation in southern border counties, our team reviewed and coded 2,193 audio recordings of emergency calls from distressed people that were transferred to Border Patrol by 911 dispatchers in Pima County, Arizona between June 2016 and July 2018. These calls amounted to approximately 683 individual emergency cases, with some recordings representing repeated calls from the same person seeking rescue.

Other data sources we reviewed and drew from for this report, but did not include in our statistical calculations, include:

- A sample of 64 audio files of 911 calls transferred to Border Patrol in June 2022, and another 4 cases of US citizens/ English-speakers calling for emergency search and rescue during the same month
- 65 "Lost Person" Incident Reports from June 2022
- 42 audio files of 911 calls transferred to Border Patrol in 2015
- 171 audio files of 911 calls classified as "Search and Rescue" cases received by Pima County in 2019. These were cases of lost English-speaking hikers or tourists in the area, i.e., calls that were not transferred to Border Patrol for response.
- Official Pima County rules and regulations, as well as interviews, meetings and email exchanges with Pima

# Dedicated County Government Search & Rescue Resources

There are many search and rescue resources that the Pima County Sheriff's Department has available to assist in a search for a lost person. PCSD employs their own search and rescue coordinators who are responsible for analyzing each case and deciding what resources to deploy. In addition to these coordinators, the department works with a volunteer search team called the Southern Arizona Rescue Association ([SARA](#)). As of 2018, Pima County employed eight search and rescue deputies, and SARA had over 150 trained volunteers.<sup>3</sup> SARA volunteers are both medically trained and trained in "wilderness searching, cave rescues, high-angle and technical rescues, swift water rescues, mine rescues, and outdoor safety education." Pima County may also use helicopters, drones, infrared cameras, and a trained canine team to aid in search and rescue missions.<sup>4</sup> These numerous resources are rarely if ever deployed to aid in a search for a caller perceived to be undocumented.

- County Sheriff's Department deputies, including Search and Rescue deputies
- Humanitarian aid volunteer testimony by those who work with community-based and non-governmental borderlands groups to mitigate death and suffering on the border. These are volunteers who have participated in or witnessed medical evacuations of critically ill patients in the borderlands, the law enforcement and medical actions of Border Patrol agents in the field, and/or community-based search and rescue mobilizations in the absence of government action, and can therefore testify to the observed role of border and law enforcement agents in these life or death scenarios.

## *PROFILING AND DISCRIMINATION*

"During any contact with a member of the public, department members shall treat all persons equally without regard to their race, ethnicity, or national origin. In deciding to initiate contact with any member of the public, department members shall not consider the race, ethnicity, or national origin of that person."

—Pima County Sheriff's Department  
[Standards of Conduct](#)

"We don't transfer calls to Border Patrol simply because it's a UDA."<sup>5</sup>

—Pima County Sheriff Deputy Wadley

"I have a UDA on the line."

—Pima County 911 Operator #8258  
on transfer to Border Patrol



In May 2019, a 17-year old unaccompanied minor named Daniel fell ill while attempting to cross through the Arizona desert to reach his family in the United States. He had fainted and was too weak to stand, and did not have water with him.

His traveling companions had left him within a 10-15 minute walk of a paved road, and had contacted his family members to alert them of his condition, providing them with a screenshot of a pin of his location in Google Maps and photos of nearby street signs indicating he was on the outskirts of Marana, AZ, a suburban area contiguous with the city of Tucson in Pima County. Daniel's family tried calling Border Patrol for help, but the agency refused to do anything. They also contacted the Mexican Consulate and local humanitarian groups. A humanitarian volunteer then called 911 and advised the Pima County dispatcher of Daniel's last known location, and all other information regarding his critical state. The dispatcher told the volunteer that two local fire departments, as well as Pima County Sheriff's deputies, were en route to the scene to search for Daniel. A few hours later, Pima County Deputy T.G. Rice informed the volunteer that the search and rescue effort had been called off before arriving on the scene. According to the incident report, the case had been transferred to Border Patrol because Daniel was "a confirmed illegal immigrant."

The deputy could not provide Daniel's family with the name or phone number of any Border Patrol agent working on his case, and did not even know which Border Patrol station, if any, was handling it. When the volunteer tried to contact the Border Patrol Tucson Station general line, the phone rang and rang with no answer, and with no way to leave a message. Daniel's family could not confirm what, if any, measures Border Patrol was taking to rescue him. Given that the agency had already declined to help when first contacted about Daniel's case, the family's hopes were not high. Three days after the 911 call, and four days since he was known to be in distress, the Mexican Consulate notified them that Daniel had died: his body had been found within 200 feet of the location that the family had shared with both the Pima County Sheriff's Department and Border Patrol.

Deputy Rice's incident report reads: "[A family member] informed me that her cousin [Daniel] crossed into the country illegally from Mexico.



She heard information from unknown people, calling her from various different numbers, that her cousin had fainted and was left without food or water somewhere in the area of [two cross-streets in Marana, AZ]...At that time, I contacted Sergeant S. Ferree #5426 with Search and Rescue Unit and briefed him of the situation. **Sergeant Ferree requested I give Border Patrol the information, as [Daniel] was a known illegal immigrant, so they could take the lead on the investigation.** At that time, I had Communications forward all the information to Border Patrol and I made contact with a Border Patrol agent... the Border Patrol agent thanked me for my time and disconnected the line. This concludes my involvement in this incident."

Daniel's family and a coalition of humanitarian groups and advocates confronted then-Pima County Sheriff Mark Napier and his deputies regarding their role in contributing to the 17-year old's death by calling off local emergency services in favor of forwarding his case to Border Patrol. The Sheriff and his deputies denied any wrong-doing, stating that they do not make decisions regarding allocation or resources based on immigration status, but rather based solely on a caller's geographical location, despite the fact that Daniel was near an urban area and their own incident report stated that the search effort was called off after they learned Daniel's immigration status. In response, the humanitarian volunteer who called 911 on behalf of Daniel's family said the following to the PCSD officials: "*This case was treated*

*differently... rather than respond to the actual information that was called into 911, it was because of who [Daniel] was, his identity, it was put into this separate category of transfer to Border Patrol with no follow-up, and it seems like Border Patrol are not accountable to the families that are calling nor to the residents of Pima County... sure they might have agents and helicopters, but if it's not their highest priority then that doesn't matter. Fire departments and volunteer Search and Rescue were in the area. This is a 17-year-old kid who was alone, close to a city, and the categories that you talked about earlier as what might shift the case to Border Patrol don't apply in this situation. The only common denominator was that the agent suspected that [Daniel] was undocumented."*

“This case was treated differently... rather than respond to the actual information that was called into 911, it was because of who [Daniel] was, his identity, it was put into this separate category... The only common denominator was that the agent suspected that [Daniel] was undocumented.”

—Humanitarian Volunteer

The Pima County Sheriff's Department operates two 911 call centers—one based in Tucson and one based in Ajo. These call centers receive hundreds of emergency calls every year from people who become lost, sick, or injured while attempting to cross the border and are in need of rescue. Arizona state law mandates that county sheriff's offices [are responsible](#) for providing search and rescue services. Additionally, the Pima County Sheriff's Department's [own policy](#) clearly states that they must "conduct a search when there is sufficient cause to believe that *anyone* is lost, injured, stranded, or deceased in a remote and normally inaccessible area" [emphasis added]. By policy and by law, Pima County is obligated to provide search, rescue, and recovery response for all people within its jurisdiction.

Pima County's [internal directives](#) also prohibit employees from profiling, a practice they define as "an inappropriate reliance on factors such as race, ethnicity, national origin [...] as a factor in deciding whether to take law enforcement action or to provide service."

Despite these legal mandates, the county only provides reliable search and rescue services for those perceived to be US citizens, and forwards cases involving perceived undocumented migrating people to Border Patrol. As the first point of contact, 911 dispatchers quickly profile a caller for their apparent immigration status,

then decide whether to activate a county-led emergency response, or to transfer the call to a Border Patrol call center.<sup>6</sup>

When confronted about their discriminatory practices, Pima County deputies insist that their decision to transfer cases to Border Patrol is based not on citizenship status, but rather on the geographical location of a caller. In a June 2019 meeting with concerned community groups regarding Daniel's case, Pima County Sheriff's Department Deputy Jesus Lopez asserted how "depending on what area of the county that person's missing in, we'll direct to the closest resources where that person is lost and when it's a remote area of Pima County, it's a lot easier for us to pass the case to Border Patrol." Then-Sheriff Mark Napier reiterated this point, insisting that transferring a call to Border Patrol "is not predicated on immigration status as much as it is on the resources available in the region...especially in the very remote areas of the county." Deputy Wadley then asserted, "We don't transfer calls to Border Patrol simply because it's a UDA."

However, we find that the county's claim that immigration status is not the determining factor for transfer to Border Patrol to be demonstrably false. Volunteers with humanitarian organizations are routinely told by 911 dispatchers that "if it's a migrant, we transfer it to Border Patrol." We have documented cases such as Daniel's, in which Pima County transfers 911 callers who are in or near urban areas where sheriffs routinely patrol and respond to emergencies, precisely because of the caller's suspected immigration status. We have also documented clear instances in which Pima County sheriffs, not Border Patrol, have responded to emergency calls from English-speakers who are lost and/or in distress in the exact same remote borderland areas where people crossing the border often call for rescue. For example, in 2019, Pima County received a 911 call from an English-speaking hunter who was lost and injured in a remote area near Arivaca, a region that sees high numbers of migrating people as well as death and disappearance.

Dispatch did not transfer the call to Border Patrol. Instead, dispatch collected the case information and stayed on the line as she transferred the call to a county medical team for further assessment. In response to questions about his location, the caller stated "Oh no, there is no trailhead, I'm actually out like in the middle of the mountains." Within minutes, the caller was told, "we do have your coordinates, and we are actively searching... you're kind of out there, we absolutely should be able to find you, it just might take a moment," and again, "we're out there searching for you." Despite the remarkable similarity between this case and the many calls from undocumented migrants in the same area, Pima County Sheriff's Department handled the case in-house, and had sent deputies to the scene before they even got off the phone with the caller.

In some recordings we obtained of calls between dispatch and law enforcement officials from different counties, the practice of discrimination based on citizenship status is stated outright. On August 21st, 2015, an officer from the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Department reported that he had received a call from a person who was lost in the Arizona desert in a region that fell within Pima County's jurisdiction. The two border county dispatchers then had the following exchange:

**Pima County 911 Dispatch:** "Okay, is [the caller] like a UDA or...?"

**Santa Cruz County Officer:** "It is unknown at this time, ma'am."

**Pima County:** "Okay.... are they speaking Spanish or English?"

**Santa Cruz:** "They are speaking Spanish, they are saying...they can see the highway and they can see the vehicles, he has uh, some water with him, and he has an orange, and he--"

**Pima County:** [interrupting] "Okay, did you guys ask them if they're illegal, cause we don't go search for the illegals."

Based on this exchange, the Pima County dispatcher transferred the call away from local 911 services to the US Border Patrol, telling the agent, "[Santa Cruz Sheriff's Office] didn't ask if he was illegal, but he's in the middle of nowhere, so I can only assume he probably is."

In an [article](#) about a young man named Martin Sarabia who went missing while crossing the border through Pima County, journalist Jean Guerrero described finding his cell-phone in the desert and learning that he had made seven distress calls to 911 prior to his disappearance. In the recordings, Sarabia can be heard begging for help and saying that he was dying of thirst. As a part of a later records request, our team received internal emails from PCSD discussing releasing these call records to the journalist, and discussing their policy regarding such calls. These emails clearly indicate that location, combined with spoken language, is used *as an indicator* of immigration status, rather than as the primary factor in determining provision of services. A county employee stated that the call was "*consistent with an UDA in distress* based on GPS plotting as well as caller speaking Spanish and describing being lost and dying of thirst" [emphasis added]. Earlier in the email exchange, another employee stated, "I checked with Communications Supervisor Tony Portrey on policy and procedures with this type of call. Per Supervisor Portrey, the practice is to hand the caller off to BP when the caller appears to be a border crosser requesting help." Sarabia's calls were all transferred to Border Patrol, with no follow-up or documentation as to their outcome or whether Border Patrol had even activated a search. Sarabia was never found.

As in this case, it is clear in our review of 911 calls that rather than being the basis for transferring a call, geographical location is just one factor used to informally establish the citizenship status of a caller. Dispatchers do not directly question callers regarding their immigration status, precisely to avoid violating their own anti-discrimination protocols and constitutional protections.<sup>7</sup> In 91% of 911 calls we reviewed, there was no explicit mention of a distressed

person's immigration status prior to transfer.<sup>8</sup> Instead, dispatch uses a caller's spoken language, in combination with a call originating from a remote area, to quickly assess whether or not a caller is undocumented. Dispatch frequently asks "estás perdido?" and then immediately transfers the call, as though they had memorized the phrase as a trigger for when to transfer to Border Patrol. There are numerous examples of this from the calls from June 2022 alone:

**Pima County 911 Dispatch:** "911, do you have a police, fire, or medical emergency?"

**Caller:** "Speak Spanish?"

**911:** "No hablo. Uno [sic] momento por favor. ¿Estás perdido? [I don't speak. One moment please. Are you lost?]"

**Caller:** "Sí..."

**911:** "Uno [sic] momento." [BP transfer].

-911 Call, Tucson Station, 6/4/2022

**Pima County 911 Dispatch to Border Patrol:** "I've got a lost Spanish-speaking male on the line."

-911 Call, Tucson Station, 6/19/2022

**Pima County 911 Dispatch:** 911, where is your emergency?

**Caller:** No hablo inglés.

**911:** I'm sorry?

**Caller:** No hablo inglés. No English.

**911:** ¿Estás perdido en el desierto? [Are you lost in the desert?]

**Caller:** Sí, estoy perdido en el desierto. [Yes, I'm lost in the desert]

**911:** Okay, un momento. [BP transfer].

-911 Call, Tucson Station, 6/6/2022

In 2018, Pima County 911 dispatch received a call from a Maricopa County 911 dispatch employee, transferring a call they had received from a man who was in Pima County's jurisdiction:

**Maricopa County 911 Dispatch:** "Okay, so they're lost in the desert, they said the last town they know they went through is Arivaca..."

**Pima County 911 Dispatch:** "So he's an illegal as far as you can tell?"

This exchange led Pima County dispatch to state, "actually, we're not going to deal with it," and to recommend Maricopa transfer the call directly to border enforcement.

Whether 911 dispatchers directly question callers regarding their status, or informally profile them as undocumented based on other criteria, the result is the same: Pima County segregates its emergency response system on the basis of perceived immigration status, transferring calls from people profiled as undocumented to Border Patrol, and calls from people assumed to be US citizens or foreign tourists to responders from the Pima County Sheriff's Department, local EMS, and county volunteer search and rescue services. This practice amounts to systematic profiling and discrimination against people in distress.

## *THE DENIAL OF THE 14TH AMENDMENT RIGHT TO EQUAL PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW*

Pima County Sheriff's Department's practice of selectively referring calls to Border Patrol violates the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution by creating wide disparities in search and rescue responses. The Fourteenth Amendment guarantees "any person within [the United States] the equal protection of the laws."

**“...actually, we’re  
not going to  
deal with it...”**

—Pima County Dispatch

A state actor violates the Equal Protection Clause when it selectively denies “its protective services to certain disfavored minorities.”<sup>9</sup>The Supreme Court has long recognized that the Equal Protection Clause protects against discrimination on the basis of nationality.<sup>10</sup>

The Ninth Circuit has further clarified that nondiscrimination in law enforcement is a constitutional right, and that this right is violated when a state actor denies protection to disfavored persons.<sup>11</sup> The Fourteenth Amendment is therefore violated not only when services are withheld on a discriminatory basis, but also when they are diminished.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the mere existence of a segregated system constitutes discrimination, as established by *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>13</sup>

Pima County’s policy and practice of transferring 911 calls to Border Patrol when they know or suspect the caller is an undocumented migrant is unconstitutionally discriminatory. The result of the policy and/or practice is the denial and diminishment of critical, potentially life-saving measures to a disfavored minority: migrants and individuals perceived to be unauthorized immigrants. The county can be liable, regardless of whether the call referrals result from a written policy or a well-established practice of 911 operators acting within their discretion.

## *LACK OF SPANISH- LANGUAGE FLUENCY AND IN-HOUSE INTERPRETATION*

Our review of 911 calls shows a consistent lack of Spanish-language fluency and in-house interpretation among Pima County dispatchers who are receiving a high volume of calls from monolingual Spanish speakers in severe distress on a daily basis. This lack of timely and consistent Spanish-language support means that dispatchers

do not comprehend basic information regarding the severity of distress or the location of the caller, overlooking and silencing vital information that callers are desperately trying to communicate as quickly as possible. We reviewed numerous calls in which dispatchers respond in English to a Spanish-speaking caller who actively communicates that they do not speak English:

**911 Dispatch:** 911, where is your emergency?

**Caller:** No puedo hablar en inglés, señor, solo así en español. [*I can't speak English sir, only Spanish*]

**911:** Uh - Is there anyone that speaks English nearby?

**Caller:** No, no entiendo, señor, no entiendo. No hay uno que sabía hablar en español ahí? [*No, I don't understand sir, I don't understand, there isn't anyone who knows how to speak Spanish there?*]

**911:** Are you lost?

**Caller:** Solo en español, no puedo hablar en inglés... Inglés, no puedo...ya estamos muriendo, somos seis, señor"... [*I only speak Spanish, I can't speak in English, I can't in English... we are dying, we are six people sir.*]

-911 Call, PCSD Ajo Station, 8/14/2015

**911 Dispatch:** "911, Where is your emergency?"

**Caller:** "Ayúdenme aquí" [*Help me here*]

**911 Dispatch:** "Pardon me?"

**Caller:** "Ayúdenme" [*Help me*]

**911 Dispatch:** "Do you need the police?"

**Caller:** "Eh? Ayúden.... Ya voy a morir. Ayúdenme... aquí estoy" [*Help... I'm going to die. Help me. I'm here.*]

**911 Dispatch:** "You speak Spanish... You don't speak English?"

**Caller:** "Eh?"

**911 Dispatch:** "Do you speak English?"

-911 Call, PCSD Tucson Station, 2018

**911 Dispatch:** "911, what is the address of your emergency?"

**Caller:** "Hola, buenos días... Español?" [*Hello, good morning... Spanish?*]

**911:** "No, I'm sorry, do you speak English?"

**Caller:** "No, es que estoy muriendo en el desierto." [*No, I'm dying in the desert.*]

**911:** "Okay, uno [sic] momento okay?"

-911 Call, PCSD Tucson Station, 6/3/2022

We found that in 68% of 911 calls, dispatchers lacked any Spanish language ability or their Spanish was so inadequate that they were unable to effectively communicate with callers in distress. Non-Spanish-speaking dispatchers contacted interpretation services in only 2% of these cases. The role of interpretation services in these emergencies is itself problematic and dysfunctional, as in our review we found that transfers to interpretation services involved placing a distressed caller on hold for several minutes, often without explanation—wasting cell phone battery and increasing the likelihood of calls being dropped or a caller hanging up in confusion.

Lack of Spanish-language fluency among borderland 911 dispatchers causes extensive mishandling of emergency cases, as dispatchers routinely fail to collect critical information from distressed callers to support in their timely rescue. Pima County is a border county facing a humanitarian crisis affecting primarily native Spanish speakers within their jurisdiction, and fields hundreds if not thousands of emergency

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calls in Spanish every year. The Pima County Sheriff's Department is simply not equipped to provide the services they are mandated to, if their 911 dispatchers are not qualified to respond to a Spanish-speaking caller. When fielding emergency calls from people crossing the border, it is therefore essential that 911 dispatchers have quick and quality access to *in-house* interpretation services, if they are not fluent Spanish speakers themselves.

### *LACK OF MISSING PERSON INTAKE AND MEDICAL ASSESSMENT*

"When the 911 dispatcher receives a rescue type call...The dispatcher will obtain the pertinent info such as name, clothing description, medical condition, location or landmarks, food and water situation, etc. They will then take that information and generate an incident number. Once the information is obtained, the dispatcher will typically hang up the phone--this is because we do not want to drain the subject's phone battery. That is their lifeline and if the battery dies we have no way to contact them."

--Pima County Search and Rescue Coordinator, via email

On June 30, 2022, Pima County received a 911 call from a Spanish-speaking caller lost in the desert. The caller, clearly in distress, repeatedly told dispatch that he needed help and did not have much phone battery left. Though the dispatcher seemed to speak adequate Spanish, they did not ask the caller any further questions regarding their "name, clothing description, medical condition, location or landmarks, food and water situation, etc," as is their stated practice with search and rescue calls. Instead, they rapidly transferred the call to Border Patrol, reported that they were not able to collect locational information from the call beyond the coordinates of the cell-phone tower, and hung up.

The incident report for this case indicates that Border Patrol was not able to locate the caller. Case notes read: "I tried calling the phone number but it immediately went to voicemail. I requested a ping through Communications. Verizon advised that the last ping had a location at the Keystone Peak Tower. The phone was now powered off and no location data was able to be obtained. At this point [the caller] has not been location [sic]. The location is unknown and there have been no additional calls from [the caller]. NFI [No further involvement]." The caller's cell battery appears to have run out, as the caller warned that it would. As dispatch had failed to conduct a basic intake for the caller while they had them on the line, there was no further information to evaluate the possibility of activating a search.

Conducting an immediate and thorough missing-persons intake is crucial to mounting effective search and rescue efforts. However, our data shows that Pima County 911 dispatchers do not conduct missing-persons intakes for people they perceive to be undocumented. **In our study of emergency calls in Pima County, we found that dispatch never conducted a single standard missing persons intake for a distressed caller who they had profiled as undocumented. We found that in 99% of these cases, the dispatchers rapidly move to transfer undocumented callers to Border Patrol without collecting any further information regarding their condition.** In the 1% of cases in which dispatchers did record some information from undocumented callers before transfer to Border Patrol, these intakes were neither methodical nor comprehensive when compared to intakes routinely conducted for English-speaking callers. Neglecting to conduct a basic missing-persons intake places a caller's life in further danger: when an emergency call drops on transfer to Border Patrol, or the caller loses cell service or battery, then zero information has been gathered that could be used to mobilize a life-saving response.

In addition to a missing-persons intake, assessing the medical status of an emergency caller is critical to organizing an effective and

timely rescue. In 2016, Pima County employees stated that it is their practice to always ask if a caller is having a medical emergency and if that caller is the victim of a crime. This is to determine what resources need to be activated. Despite this mandate, in the more than 2,000 calls we reviewed, **dispatch only asked callers anything about their medical condition in 3% of cases**, at times even ignoring or talking over callers who were explicitly trying to describe their condition.

Our team analyzed six months of 911 calls that were classified as "search and rescue" by Pima County from 2019—calls from lost hikers, tourists, citizens and other English speakers which were not transferred to Border Patrol, but were instead handled by Pima County's own search and rescue coordinators. In each of these calls, dispatch conducted an intake for the caller, gathering information such as the caller's surroundings and landmarks, whether they had food and water, details regarding their medical condition, identifying information for all people involved in the situation, and how much cell-phone battery they had left. Dispatch ensured that the most essential information was collected while they had the caller on the line, prior to any call transfer to further resources. In many cases, it was apparent that even as dispatch collected this information, they were simultaneously coordinating a hasty response, as the recording of the initial emergency call often concluded with dispatch informing the caller that a sheriff's deputy was already en route to their general location.

Pima County 911 services consistently fail to conduct thorough intakes for the masses of undocumented people in distress who call 911. In turn, county SAR coordinators refer to the lack of locational information as a justification not to search for a lost caller. For the many callers who are able to make a final 911 call before losing battery life in a remote area, the county's practice of not immediately gathering this critical information upon first contact is not only negligent and discriminatory but endangering to people's lives, as it can

determine whether or not any attempt to locate the missing person will be carried out at all.

## *CALL DROPS AND NO NOTICE OF TRANSFER*

Dispatchers rarely notify or explain to perceived undocumented callers that their call is being transferred to another agency, let alone that they will be connected to Border Patrol. **In 50% of calls, 911 dispatchers did not alert distressed callers that they would be transferred whatsoever. In another 13% of cases, they were informed only in English, a language they clearly did not speak.** This means that the caller, who may be having a severe emergency, abruptly hears a dial tone followed by the sound of a phone ringing without explanation. Callers sometimes hang up or begin crying upon hearing the call transfer. Most calls proceed as follows:



**911 Dispatch:** 911, where is your emergency?

**Caller:** Bueno? [Hello?]

**911:** ¿Está perdido? [Are you lost?]   
 Caller: Bueno... si, estoy perdido amigo. [Hello... yes, I'm lost friend]

**911:** Un momento. [Call ringing, transfer to BP]

-911 Call, PCSD Tucson Station, 6/15/2022

**Caller:** Buenas tardes... [unintelligible]

**911 Dispatch:** Momento. [Pause]

**Caller:** Hola?

**911 Dispatch:** Hello.

**Caller:** ¿Habla español?

**911 Dispatch:** No. Un momento.

[Call ringing, transfer to BP]

-911 Call, PCSD Tucson Station, 6/16/2022

**Pima County 911 Dispatch:** 911, where is your emergency?

**Caller:** Ayuda, ayuda.

**911:** Un momento.

[Transfer to BP after a long pause of silence].

-911 Call, Tucson Station, 06/07/2022

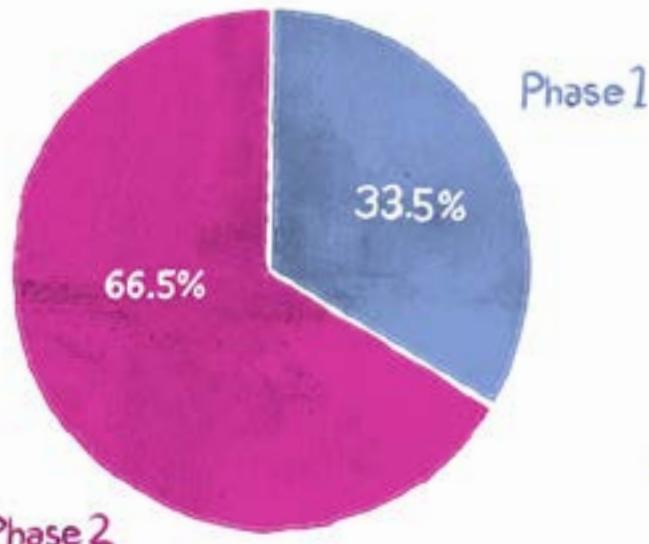
There are numerous cases of long unexplained pauses before a dial tone upon transfer, or cases of the phone ringing for minutes with no response from Border Patrol—again, with no explanation from dispatch. For a caller in distress with limited battery life, hearing the abrupt, unexplained sound of a dial tone and ringing may lead them to hang up, believing the call has already been lost. Only rarely does dispatch instruct a caller not to hang up. In other cases, a call may be dropped on transfer to Border Patrol due to technical failures, with many calls coming from remote areas with poor cell service. This is especially dangerous as many undocumented callers are using “911 only” phones,<sup>14</sup> meaning it is not possible to call them back, and dispatch has collected no information prior to initiating the transfer.

## MINIMAL USE OF CALL TRACING

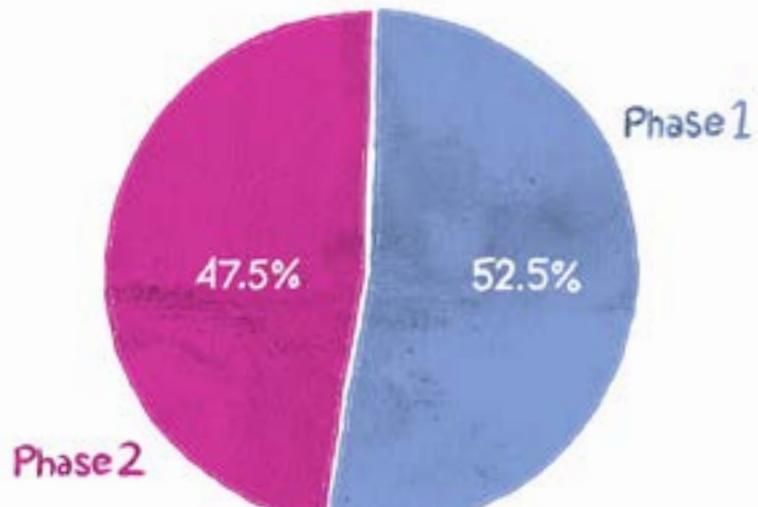
Determining a lost persons’ location is a serious challenge when mobilizing effective borderland search and rescue. Many people fall into distress while walking through vast, remote deserts with few to no recognizable landmarks, far from roadways or civilization. County 911 dispatchers have access to cell-phone tracing technology that derives GPS coordinates from the devices of emergency callers. Border Patrol itself does not use call-tracing technology, but rather relies solely on the GPS data provided by county 911 dispatchers to locate people in distress, and to decide whether or not to activate a search response.

Unfortunately, the accuracy of such tracing can be extremely limited. If a caller’s device can only connect to a single area cell-phone tower, the call cannot be accurately triangulated and dispatch will only receive “Phase 1” coordinates—the coordinates of the cell tower, sometimes with a direction and/or range of accuracy for the location of the call. This is especially likely when calls come from remote areas with few cell-phone towers. Without triangulation, the GPS coordinates for Phase 1 calls are extremely imprecise. The average accuracy for Phase 1

Tucson Station



Ajo Station



*Pima County Dispatch began forwarding calls to a 24-hour Border Patrol call center in 2015. Prior to 2015, emergency calls from people perceived to be undocumented were transferred to a single cell phone carried by a Border Patrol agent who was often actively on patrol in the desert. This "emergency" cell phone was frequently out of service, out of battery, and at times, turned completely off over the weekend or overnight. For years, untold numbers of calls from people in direct need went unanswered. Pima County estimates that 70% of the 911 calls transferred to Border Patrol during this period did not go through.<sup>15</sup>*

calls was 21,813 meters, or approximately 13.5 miles, and some were as inaccurate as over 100,000 meters, or 60+ miles.

When a caller has a cellphone that can connect to more than one tower, 911 dispatchers can triangulate their location with remarkable accuracy, producing "Phase 2" GPS coordinates. Whether dispatch is able to derive Phase 1 or Phase 2 coordinates from a caller's device has a massive impact on the likelihood that a caller will be rescued, and can determine whether or not a search will even be attempted, as Border Patrol frequently declines to activate any rescue attempt without precise GPS coordinates.

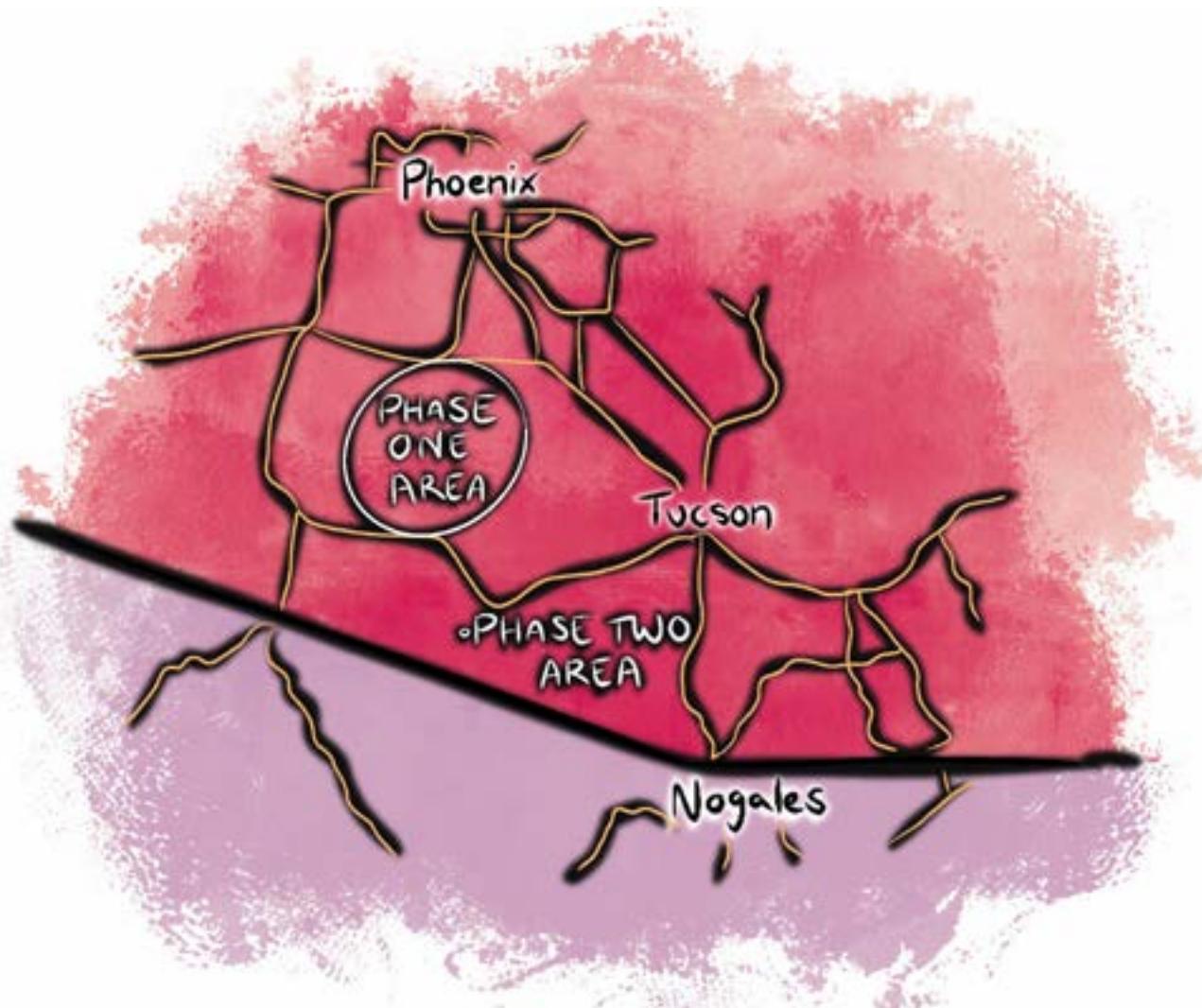
On March 7, 2017, a man named José called 911 seeking emergency assistance because he was lost and alone in the desert. The Pima County dispatcher was only able to derive Phase 1 coordinates, with a search radius of nearly five miles in every direction from a remote cell-phone tower. Over the ensuing nine hours, José managed to contact 911 at least six times. As time passes, José can be heard breathing heavily and moaning as a Border Patrol agent tells the Pima County dispatcher, "there's nothing we can do actually," in reference to the imprecision of José's GPS coordinates. In his final call, José is barely audible. Eventually, the calls stop. The outcome of José's case is unknown, but he likely perished.

In a series of emergency calls on March 27, 2017 from three lost people in distress, dispatch is initially only able to derive Phase 1 GPS coordinates, with a margin of error of 103,526 meters (nearly 65 miles). When the 911 dispatcher relays the accuracy of the coordinates to border enforcement upon transferring the call, the Border Patrol agent laughs out loud saying, "that's baaaaaad." In this case, however, the Pima County dispatcher stays on the line with the caller and Border Patrol, waiting 30 seconds to recycle the cell-phone tracing technology. This 30 second additional effort renders an incredibly consequential result: Phase 2 coordinates appear for the caller with an accuracy of 80 meters (~262 feet). In a

similar call from 2018, a Border Patrol agent asks 911 dispatch to stay on the line to try to get better locational information. After over eight minutes of tracking failure, dispatch suddenly extracts Phase 2 GPS coordinates.

In some cases, by taking the time to retrace a caller's cell phone, 911 dispatchers were able to generate Phase 2 coordinates from an initial Phase 1 call. By deriving more precise locational information, dispatchers were able to transform seemingly unviable search scenarios into pinpointed rescue missions. However, the decision to remain on the line for the purposes of improving locational information appears to be up to the personal discretion of the individual 911 dispatcher, rather than being a matter of policy. In fact, it was only in rare instances that dispatchers stayed on the line for this purpose. More often, county officials immediately hung up after relaying the initial GPS coordinates to border enforcement, even when those coordinates were Phase 1 with a massive margin of error.

Dispatchers neglecting to take all possible measures to derive more accurate locational information from distressed callers has tragic consequences. Border Patrol routinely declines to respond to lost callers without precise GPS coordinates, and treats Phase 1 calls as lost causes from the start. In one case from 2018, for example, Pima County dispatch informed the answering Border Patrol agent that the coordinates for a caller in distress have an accuracy range of over 36,000 meters, or more than 22 miles. The Border Patrol agent responded by saying, "Oh, this guy's gonna stay lost." PCSD's search and rescue team has adopted the same approach. In several of the documented cases we reviewed from 2022, PCSD declined to search for a caller after Border Patrol failed to rescue them, citing Phase 1 coordinates as justification.



In the audio recording for a call received on June 27, 2022, a caller is heard repeatedly attempting to describe his location and situation to 911 dispatch, describing being near antennas, and telling dispatch that he is wet and cold. Rather than taking note of this information or collecting any further details from the caller, dispatch interrupts him, saying, "I don't understand, un momento," and transfers the call to Border Patrol. As the caller continues to ask for help and attempts to describe what clothing he is wearing and the amount of battery left on his cell phone, Border Patrol tells the caller to shut up ("cállate, cállate!"), cutting him off to ask 911 dispatch for coordinates, which were Phase 1. Dispatch then hangs up the phone. The incident report for this case reads: "Border Patrol was not able to locate the caller and without a name they cannot check their database. The location was Phase 1 and plotted within 5384 meters. No additional calls have come from the subject... At this time the caller has not been identified and not located. NFI [No further involvement]."

As this case makes clear, Pima County dispatchers' negligent response to callers from the first point of contact can directly contribute to their death and disappearance. First, a Pima County dispatcher who did not speak adequate Spanish interrupted a caller to rapidly transfer them to Border Patrol, despite the caller's attempts to communicate crucial information about their situation, including their location. Then, Pima County dispatch immediately hung up after conveying Phase 1 coordinates to Border Patrol, rather than staying on the line to try to obtain more accurate locational information. Border Patrol then declined to search, or rapidly called off a search without locating the lost person, and Pima County search and rescue coordinators also did not activate any search effort. If Border Patrol did collect any additional locational information from speaking with the caller, they do not appear to have shared it with Pima County nor evaluated it to determine the viability of a search. The standards of intake, investigation, and evaluation made prior to writing off a case as a lost cause is far below what would be provided for a lost US citizen in the same situation.

## **DISAPPEARING ACCOUNTABILITY**

Pima County has a clear duty to verify that cases in their jurisdiction are being handled effectively and equitably. However, for years, the sheriff's department took no accountability for their role in such cases, keeping no records on the outcome of tens of thousands of calls forwarded to Border Patrol without follow-up action or tracking. In the thousands of emergency calls forwarded by Pima County to Border Patrol from 2016-2018, there were no case files nor records of any kind indicating the outcome of any of those cases. Whether the caller lived, died, or disappeared was unrecorded and unknown, an outcome that would be considered completely unacceptable for emergencies involving US citizens.

The US Border Patrol is a notoriously opaque and unaccountable organization with a poor record of responding to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The outcomes of these cases are inaccessible to the public, if they are ever recorded by the agency at all. By transferring so many emergency calls out of house to an agency well known for its lack of transparency, and with no civilian oversight, Pima County has enabled Border Patrol to effectively disappear the scale and nature of the crisis from the public view.

In the meeting regarding the case of 17-year-old Daniel, PCSD admitted no wrong-doing in their decision to call off their search effort after learning about Daniel's immigration status. Despite this, at a subsequent meeting with humanitarian groups in July 2019, PCSD distributed a draft of a revised "Lost Person Response" protocol. This new protocol appeared to implement two significant alterations to their multi-decades practice of forwarding emergency calls to Border Patrol with no follow-up or documentation, and no county deployment in the absence of Border Patrol action. On paper, the revised protocol included provisions for each 911 call from within their jurisdiction to be assigned a case number, and

for a Pima County deputy to follow up with Border Patrol on the outcome of the case.<sup>16</sup> The revised protocol also contained language indicating PCSD would consider mobilizing their own emergency response if they found that, after three hours following the initial distress call, Border Patrol had not responded.

**To investigate whether and to what extent these policy changes took place in practice, we conducted an audit of Pima County's 911 call recordings and case reports from June 2022.** We found that some documentation is indeed taking place at the county level: many of the 911 audio calls now receive case numbers and a minimal write up regarding the nature and outcome of the case. A number of files indicate that a caller was located by Border Patrol. Others indicate that a caller had not been found by the federal agency, or lacked confirmation of the person being located—this was the case in at least 17 of the 64 emergency cases that dispatchers had forwarded to Border Patrol. Much of this documentation is highly cursory, partial, or absent entirely. Many of the case files do not have a name for the distressed caller because the dispatcher did not ask. Some logs do not specify what, if any, action Border Patrol has taken. For example, on June 11th, 2022, Pima County received a 911 call from someone who said that they were lost without water. The audio file shows the 911 dispatcher using interpretation services, but only to establish that the person was lost before transferring to Border Patrol, without attempting to collect any additional information. In the incident report, Deputy Cody Pfeifer writes: "At approximately 0840 hours, I received information regarding a lost person at [redacted]. I did not have contact with the caller. This concludes my involvement."

PCSD's updated protocol has created minimal tracking and documentation of emergency cases within their jurisdiction where for decades there has been none, a change that was only implemented after pressure from community organizations and calls for public accountability. The changes appear to stop there; our review indicates that there has not been any structural

**“I have called  
four times.  
We are dying.”**

—911 caller

**“Oh, this guy’s  
gonna stay lost.”**

—Border Patrol

shift towards county emergency mobilization when Border Patrol refuses to search, continuing a multi-decades long history of county inaction and neglect in the face of reported emergencies from people crossing the border.

### *NO COUNTY RESPONSE IN ABSENCE OF BORDER PATROL RESPONSE*

“I have called four times. We are dying.”<sup>17</sup>  
—911 Call, Ajo Station, 2/17/2017

In March 2018, a man named Humberto contacted 911 eleven times over the course of ten hours. He was lost and alone in the Growler Valley on the Barry M. Goldwater Air Force Range in southern Arizona. As the hours passed, his condition was clearly deteriorating, his voice fading with each call. Despite the fact that PCSD and Border Patrol knew his precise GPS coordinates within *five meters* of accuracy, it appears that neither agency mobilized a rescue. Dispatch continued to transfer Humberto to Border Patrol each time he called 911. The Pima County dispatcher appeared to be aware that it was the same caller, still stranded in the desert, but did not alert county search and rescue services. Eventually, he stopped calling. The outcome of his case is unknown, and there is no known documentation from the county or Border Patrol regarding his case.

In another case from 2018, a distressed person who had called 911 previously and had already spoken to Border Patrol addresses a Pima County employee directly about the lack of emergency response:

**Caller [via interpreter]:** “They left us here without water, I already called before and we were told you were going to send someone to pick us up, but no one has come yet.”

**Pima County 911 Dispatcher [to interpreter]:**  
“Okay, tell him I’m going to transfer him to

Border Patrol, and someone will help him."

**Caller [via interpreter]:** "We were told that before and we were waiting and they asked for all our information and we have been waiting, and nothing."

**Dispatch [to interpreter]:** "Okay, well tell him I still have to transfer him, I have nothing to do with anyone picking him up."

-911 Call, PCSD Tucson Station, 2018

Cases like these directly undermine the claim that Pima County emergency services are transferring cases to Border Patrol solely because they believe that the immigration enforcement agency will conduct the fastest emergency response. **Of the 2,193 calls we analyzed from 2016–2018, there is not a single case in which Pima County's own search and rescue deputies responded to the emergency or were even notified about it, even when the same person had called for hours or days with no Border Patrol response, and even in cases where Border Patrol did not even answer the transferred call.**

Our June 2022 audit of Pima County's 911 call recordings and resulting case files demonstrates that, while perhaps promising on paper, the 2019 revised protocol did not result in the sheriff's department meaningfully improving their response to lost persons cases within their jurisdiction, even in the face of documented Border Patrol inaction. In the vast majority of cases in which sheriff's deputies learned that Border Patrol had taken no action to locate a distressed caller, or had called off a rescue response without locating a caller, PCSD took no further action, mobilizing no county resources whatsoever to prevent the death and disappearance of people in distress within their jurisdiction.

**Of the 64 emergency cases received by Pima County during that one-month period, there were 17 cases in which the distressed person was never located,** or there was no documentation

on the case outcome. In at least 10 of those cases, the Pima County Sheriff's Department took no further action upon learning that the 911 caller had not been located by Border Patrol. In another four cases, deputies took minimal action by texting, calling, and/or attempting to geolocate the subject using cell-phone tracing technology. There were no cases in which Pima County deployed any ground search, and only two cases in which they deployed aerial resources to aid in a search. The incident report for one of these two cases reads:

"On June 06, 2022 at approximately 2149 hours while working as a tactical flight deputy in Survey 1 I responded to a lost person call reported in the Three Points area. [Border Patrol] had been advised at approximately 1800 hours but had not sent agents to that location. As we arrived overhead I observed through the [thermal] camera a male waving at us. He was located just west of a ranch house at the provided coordinates. I relayed my observations to deputies and cleared the scene."

This was a case in which Border Patrol had coordinates for the caller's location, but had not responded. Instead, PCSD aerial support located the caller in a remote area of the county, demonstrating that county-level deployments can and do make a decisive difference in the survival, death, or disappearance of a distressed caller.

In a case from June 16, 2022, a lost caller contacted 911. Pima County dispatch rapidly transferred the call to Border Patrol, telling the agent, "I've got a male... I don't know his name, sorry." She passed on the GPS coordinates, which were Phase 2 and accurate within a range of 28 meters. According to the incident report, a PCSD SAR coordinator contacted Border Patrol the next day to follow up, and was informed by Agent Smith that Border Patrol had no record of the caller whatsoever. PCSD then attempted to call the lost person, whose phone went straight to voicemail. The incident report reads: "According to Agent Smith, it is possible the subject got picked up at some point last night

**“I have nothing  
to do with  
anyone picking  
him up.”**

—Pima County Dispatch

but without a name they wouldn't be able to verify. This concludes my involvement at this point until further information is received. NFI [No further involvement].”

In addition to demonstrating the consequences of dispatchers' negligence in collecting information from callers, this case also clearly demonstrates the danger of partnering with an agency whose priority is enforcement rather than preventing loss of life: no search was activated by either Border Patrol or PCSD because “it is possible” the caller was already arrested by Border Patrol. Neither agency can confirm whether or not this person was in fact arrested, and it is just as likely that the caller was still lost and in distress, with a phone that had since died or lost service. Despite having been able to place a successful 911 call and have this location accurately determined, it is possible that this caller was never rescued. In this case, it is easy to see that the search response would have been entirely different had the caller not been an undocumented border crosser.

There were numerous other cases just from June of 2022 showing PCSD's failure to respond. On June 17, an extremely distressed caller contacted 911 and informed dispatch that he was dying and needed help. The dispatcher did not speak Spanish. The incident report reads, “The subject [w]as not located and did not call back with additional information about his location.” Another report, also from June 17, simply reads, “Border Patrol had no contact with the individual and the subject never called back. On 06/18/22 at 1700 I checked in with [Border Patrol] again. I was informed that there was no contact with the subject.” In the corresponding audio file, the caller can be heard clearly informing dispatch, in Spanish, that he is along a highway. Dispatch did not acknowledge this, did not collect a name from the caller, and the call was dropped on transfer to Border Patrol. She had only collected Phase 1 coordinates, which she relayed to Border Patrol. Neither Border Patrol nor PCSD appear to have activated any search. Another case from June 24 reads: “On 06/24/22 at 2254 hours a Lost Person Report

was received by the Pima County Sheriff's Dept. and transferred to [Border Patrol].... At 0717 hours on 06/25/22 another call was transferred to [Border Patrol]. At 0930 hours I was informed that the subject was not yet located. At 1230 hours I was informed that the subject had still not been located, and no new information or location update." There is no indication as to whether or not PCSD ever considered activating a search.

The official justification for the practice of transferring these calls to Border Patrol is that, because their agents are heavily present throughout the desert borderlands, they will be able to respond more quickly to the caller's location. In the words of a Pima County Sheriff's Department employee, "the primary goal is to ascertain that they get the needed assistance as quickly as possible and connecting them to [Border Patrol] is the most expedient way of doing that."<sup>18</sup> There is no assessment of whether or not Border Patrol agents are actually geographically closer to the caller or able to respond faster than the Sheriff's Department's Search and Rescue Unit. The numerous documented cases in which PCSD did not deploy resources despite receiving no confirmation that Border Patrol had located the lost individuals makes it clear that the sheriff's department has simply washed their hands of any responsibility for emergencies involving undocumented migrants.

# *COMPROMISED CARE: EMS COLLABORATION WITH BORDER ENFORCEMENT*



Even when an undocumented person in distress is located and rescued, they continue to face a discriminatory system when seeking Emergency Medical Services [EMS] and definitive care at nearby hospitals. If a caller is believed to be crossing the border, their calls to 911 for medical assistance trigger a Border Patrol response. When ambulances are called, Border Patrol shows up to escort them, and at times Border Patrol agents use their own patrol cars for medical evacuations for critical patients in lieu of an ambulance. Patients then remain in Border Patrol custody for the duration of their care—often handcuffed to their hospital beds with agents stationed inside of their hospital rooms. After being discharged from emergency care, they are transferred to short-term Border Patrol holding centers and are either rapidly deported or incarcerated in the growing system of for-profit immigration detention centers. In sum, being undocumented systematically compromises the quality of medical care patients receive.

"I called 911 from the field and asked them to intercept us...when we arrived at the fire station there were approximately a dozen Border Patrol agents waiting along with the two fire department medics. I remember that while we were trying to lift Lupe out of the truck and into the ambulance, the Border Patrol agents reached in and extracted her ID from her pocket, before medics were allowed to assess her, in order to begin processing her status."

—Humanitarian Aid Volunteer Testimony

In the above case, a humanitarian aid volunteer encountered a woman with a collapsed lung and in respiratory distress and evacuated her from the Sonoran desert backcountry to the Arivaca Fire Department for emergency air transport on Christmas Day, 2011. Humanitarian aid volunteers in the militarized borderlands have witnessed numerous cases where Border Patrol agents in the field prioritize information-gathering for immigration enforcement purposes over providing emergency medical assistance in situations of life or death. In some

cases, volunteers testified that Border Patrol agents interfered with medical workers to prioritize investigating immigration violations over providing life-saving care.

This was the case for Elisa, a woman from Hidalgo, Mexico who was discovered by volunteers alone and in distress on a remote Forest Service road in the desert. Elisa could not stand up, and told volunteers that she had fallen multiple times on rocks; there was evidence of ligament tears and fractures in both of her legs. After a lengthy discussion, Elisa consented to medical evacuation despite the threat of arrest and deportation. One of the humanitarian volunteers recalls:

"I remember watching Border Patrol follow the ambulance. The next morning we learned that she was never admitted to the hospital but was rapidly deported. We traveled to Nogales and found her at a shelter, still unable to walk, having been deported to the unfamiliar city without shoes, crutches, or any ability to fill prescriptions for meds that she had received in the emergency department."

When people are detained by Border Patrol in the desert, they are subject to the discretion of individual agents who decide whether or not to seek additional emergency medical care for the person in their custody. In the summer of 2011, a group of humanitarian volunteers—including a paramedic, a nursing student, and a wilderness emergency medical technician (W-EMT)—encountered Border Patrol agents surrounding a critically ill patient on a remote southern Arizona road. One volunteer remembers:

"We were driving down Ruby Road when we saw a young man in Border Patrol custody sitting on the side of the road. The young man looked really really really sick, and they were trying to put an IV in his arm out in the field and they couldn't because he was so dehydrated that his veins were nearly invisible. We were advocating for Border Patrol to call an ambulance but we didn't have any cell-phone signal ourselves. Eventually a different Border Patrol truck came and put him in the back to

take him to a Border Patrol field station—a forward operating base—which is obviously not the same as a hospital. He was not transferred to an ambulance."

The systematic integration of border enforcement with county emergency medical response compromises the provision of timely and non-discriminatory medical care. It can also create a dangerous deterrent to contacting 911. In 2016, humanitarian volunteers encountered a man named David who had been bitten by a rattlesnake. David had been deported from his home in the US, and was urgently attempting to rejoin his family after his young daughter had been in an accident and needed surgery. Knowing that he would be deported again if he was taken to a hospital, David was very reluctant to call 911 until it became clear to him that he could die otherwise. When he finally did allow volunteers to call, Border Patrol followed him to the hospital and remained there for the duration of his care, denying him visits from his family. After extensive anti-venom treatment in the hospital, David was deported. With legitimate fear of arrest, incarceration, family separation, and deportation, many people crossing the border only call 911 services once their situation has become truly dire. Many more never contact government medical and rescue services at all.



## *BORDER ENFORCEMENT VIOLATES MEDICAL ETHICS*

“Operating within a law enforcement organization whose chief mission is to control and eventually remove undocumented immigrants from the US creates numerous loyalty conflicts for health practitioners torn between acting in their patients’ best interests and serving the mission and needs of the US government....The fact is, however, that health professionals do not have a choice in determining their loyalties: medical ethics clearly state that they are unequivocally obligated to act in the best interests of their patients – always.”

—Physicians for Human Rights

The provision of emergency medical care must be, by definition, consensual, non-endangering, protective of the life and well-being of the patient, and non-discriminatory. The pillars of medical ethics mandate that medical providers uphold the following principles of care:

- 1. Autonomy:** patients make their own decisions about medical interventions
- 2. Non-Maleficence:** medical workers must do no harm to the patient
- 3. Beneficence:** medical workers must aim to always do good to the patient
- 4. Justice:** medical workers treat all people equally and equitably

The automatic involvement of Border Patrol, ICE, and other immigration authorities in the structure of emergency medical services in the borderlands directly compromises these ethics on every level. Putting government immigration enforcement interests before those of the patient is a violation of the primary ethical responsibility that a medical provider has to the suffering person to whom they are providing care.

## *THE COST OF CRISIS*

“Border enforcement policies that increased the physical dangers associated with authorized crossings combined with Border Patrol protocols to push the care of migrants onto local hospitals and humanitarian aid organizations. As a result, local hospitals were left with the financial costs associated with treating unauthorized migrants.”

—Jill Williams, “From Humanitarian Exceptionalism to Contingent Care”<sup>19</sup>

The chief reason that emergency medical services involve border enforcement agencies is not based on any legal obligation to report immigration violations. Rather, it is the consequence of border counties bearing the financial burden for the carnage caused by federal border enforcement policy. As deaths began to skyrocket between ports of entry along the border in the early 2000s, so did the call volumes for rural and small-town fire departments, which were the first responders for undocumented people in distress in remote areas. Researcher Jill Williams chronicles the period before the mid-2000s, when Border Patrol agents were instructed to call 911 and transfer care and financial responsibility for ill and injured migrating people to local EMS responders. She writes: “Far from simply a suggested course of action, failure to comply with this protocol would result in reprimands from supervisory agents. [...] Border Patrol’s desire to avoid the responsibilities associated with providing or overseeing the care of migrants superseded enforcement efforts.”<sup>20</sup>

When counties began struggling to bear the financial burden of this ballooning need for emergency medical services, they sought reimbursement from Customs and Border Protection. As researcher Ieva Jusionyte summarizes: “[F]ire and rescue departments in small rural communities, struggling to make ends meet, are forced to report injured migrants to the Border Patrol to cover the costs for

ambulance services.”<sup>21</sup> In 2000, the Associated Press reported that Arizona counties had spent \$31 million on emergency medical services for undocumented patients; in 2003, Copper Queen Community Hospital in Bisbee, Arizona spent \$400,000 in unreimbursed emergency medical care, while one of Tucson’s two trauma centers spent \$10 million caring for “dying immigrants pulled from the desert.”<sup>22</sup> These growing financial demands caused by US border policy have since caused medical providers to rely on federal subsidies to cover the cost of emergency medical services in the borderlands. Consequently, in order to access federal reimbursement, medical workers must report the immigration status of their patients to authorities. In effect, medical workers have become unwilling accomplices to Border Patrol’s enforcement actions, medical negligence, and abusive and non-consensual patient treatment practices.

Like the county 911 and search and rescue systems, emergency medical services in the borderlands rely on and defer to the same agency that is tasked with forcing people into the desert, then [chasing, scattering](#), and violently apprehending them. And like the 911 response system, this criminalized care/enforcement is provided on a separate and unequal basis. Federal border enforcement policy has created a humanitarian crisis on the border. The massive cost of this crisis is no justification for life-saving emergency services to be left in the hands of a violent, unaccountable enforcement agency. Every person in distress must be treated humanely, with dignity, and with non-discriminatory, comprehensive care. If the cost of doing so is untenable, we must change federal border policy to address the humanitarian crisis at its root.

# Documented Rights Violations Committed by Border Patrol: Denying Access to Hospitalization

- **Border Patrol Discretion for Hospitalization:** In border counties, referral to treatment at a local medical facility is at the discretion of responding Border Patrol agents, who are empowered to detain or deport without further treatment if such treatment is assessed to be unnecessary, even by non-medical personnel.
- **Hospitals as De Facto Detention Centers:** Border Patrol routinely conducts enforcement actions in and around hospitals, in violation of the Department of Homeland Security's "sensitive locations" guidelines. The agency also violates US and international law by using hospitals as de facto detention centers where patients are denied access to legal counsel and contact with family members.
- **Violation of Patient's Right to Privacy:** Border Patrol agents station themselves inside of exam rooms when patients are receiving treatment, and in labor and delivery rooms, violating HIPAA. This includes the presence of Border Patrol during medical interviews, in which providers must elicit confidential patient histories.
- **Shackling and Medical Harms:** Border Patrol agents regularly shackle patients who are experiencing medical distress, and can override a physician's determination that these restraints will compromise quality of care.
- **Prohibition of Contact with Friends, Family, and Legal Counsel:** Patients in immigration custody are subject to "no-contact" lists while facing expedited removal without access to friends, family, or lawyers. The Border Patrol does not register patients under real names, so family members and legal counsel cannot find them in the system. Depriving patients of contact with family and friends who may not know the whereabouts of their loved one can result in temporary (or even permanent) disappearances. This is especially nightmarish for families whose last call from their relative came from the desert, and who are now left without knowing whether their loved one survived the journey.
- **Unsafe Medical Discharge Through Ports of Entry:** Healthcare professionals in border communities have described practices which do not meet any existing minimum standards for the safe discharge of patients—for example, patients deported to Mexico from US hospitals with IVs, catheters, and stents in place but without anyone having checked if resources for ongoing care are present in the removal destination.

—Abridged excerpt from *Zero Protection: How U.S. Border Enforcement Harms Migrant Safety and Health* (Physicians for Human Rights, 2019)

# CONCLUSION: THE DEADLY CONSEQUENCES OF 911 SYSTEM SEGREGATION

Even in the best of circumstances in which a person in distress is able to place a successful 911 call that generates precise geographic coordinates of their location, many people are still left to die by government agencies if they are presumed to be crossing the border. In one such case, a man named Armando contacted 911 at 7:10 pm on January 30, 2018. He told dispatch that he needed help, and had no water. The county dispatcher was able to use call-tracing to pinpoint Armando's geographic location within a dozen meters of accuracy. Profiling him as an undocumented person crossing the border, the 911 dispatcher attempted to transfer Armando's call to the Border Patrol. This time, however, the transfer went to a recording saying, "your call cannot be completed as dialed." The designated Border Patrol phone line for 911 call transfers appeared to be down. After trying several times to transfer the call and getting the same recording each time, dispatch instead transferred the call to an agent who answered at the Ajo Border Patrol station.

But a few minutes later, Armando called 911 back. The county dispatcher again transferred Armando to an Ajo Border Patrol agent who told the county dispatcher that the caller's location was not in his "Area of Responsibility" and asked dispatch to transfer Armando to a different Border Patrol station. The dispatcher attempted to transfer Armando, but again the call went to a non-working number. Armando can be heard pleading for his life, telling dispatch, in Spanish, "Please, I need help (*"Por favor, necesito ayuda"*), and, "my battery is dying (*"no tengo carga"*)."

Armando continued to use his remaining cell phone battery to contact 911 repeatedly over the next 14 hours, despite the fact that his Phase 2 call had produced pinpointed GPS coordinates. In these calls, Armando can be heard coughing and vomiting. With each attempt to request rescue, Armando repeated that he needed help and that his cell-phone battery was dying. With each call, he was alternately transferred to non-working Border Patrol numbers that never picked up or went to voicemail, or to various Border Patrol agents who answered and agreed to speak with Armando, but who did not appear to be coordinating his rescue. By the following morning, calls from Armando ceased. The outcome of his case is unknown.

When it comes to the provision of emergency services, segregation is alive and well in the Southwest borderlands. As established in the landmark ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, separate is not equal by definition, and the mere existence of a different emergency response system for undocumented callers constitutes unlawful discrimination. In addition to violating the Constitution, this dual system is materially unequal in the starkest sense possible: whether a caller is profiled as a US citizen or an undocumented migrant can mean the difference between life or death. From systematically failing to conduct missing persons intakes, to a lack of Spanish-language fluency among 911 dispatchers, to calls being transferred to Border Patrol without notice or consent, to a lack of oversight, follow-up, or documentation of missing persons cases, in the Arizona borderlands, county government does not provide undocumented callers in distress the same caliber of emergency response as that provided to US citizens. In the final analysis, the segregation of 911 emergency response systems in Pima County means that many people who call for help and are profiled as migrants are simply never heard from again.

# DEMANDS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, emergency services will never be enough to put an end to the crisis of death and disappearance in the borderlands. People will continue to die and go missing on a massive scale as long as the policies and agencies that cause them to do so continue to exist. To end the mass death, suffering, and disappearance of migrating people means ending the policy of Prevention Through Deterrence. It also means fully demilitarizing the borderlands and abolishing the US Border Patrol. We offer the following interim demands as harm reduction measures.

As in previous reports, we call on government agencies to establish dedicated borderland emergency response systems that are *fully separate from immigration enforcement*. Such response systems must be timely and well-funded, with a front line of medical responders and trained search and rescue teams who scan the landscape with an empathetic eye rather than a punitive one. All measures necessary must be taken to ensure that emergency response (search and rescue as well as EMS) are free from the pressures to prioritize immigration enforcement over the preservation of life.

As the initial point of contact for thousands of people in distress, Pima County must be equipped to respond to these cases with the same competency, compassion, and quality of care provided to anyone else in need of emergency assistance within their jurisdiction. To that end, the following reforms should be made to the 911 dispatch system:

- Pima County must maintain responsibility for the outcome of all people lost and stranded within their jurisdiction who reach out to them for emergency assistance. As such, the Pima County Sheriff's Department must uphold their own policies and respond to all people lost and stranded within their jurisdiction with the same urgency, tactics, resources, and transparency regardless of immigration status.
- Borderlands counties, especially those covering rural areas that see high numbers of death and disappearance from people crossing the border, must employ fluent Spanish speakers and/or provide adequate in-house interpretation.
- Dispatchers must conduct a full missing-persons intake for all lost callers, collecting crucial information on location, medical condition, and phone battery levels in the event of a call being dropped or lost on transfer.
- Dispatch must clearly inform each caller, in the caller's primary language, of any upcoming call transfers and advise that they do not hang up. Wherever possible, dispatch should remain on the line to continue seeking improved location coordinates.

In addition to the above recommendations, we echo and adopt the following demands from Physicians for Human Rights:

- Ensure non-discriminatory access to emergency medical services through adoption of legislation that codifies the sensitive locations policy into the Immigration and Nationality Act;
- Ensure that access to lifesaving medical and other humanitarian assistance is safeguarded by explicitly protecting from prosecution those who offer medical or humanitarian services to migrants;
- Separate search and rescue from law enforcement by clarifying the respective mandates of Border Patrol and local search and rescue efforts, to ensure that medical personnel and activities are protected from pressures to prioritize immigration policy enforcement over medical care, and to ensure that those who are rescued have access to medical care;
- Review U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) authority in order to determine how constitutional protections can be preserved in and around medical facilities during implementation of border enforcement activities



## Endnotes

1 Search and Rescue volunteers involved with this case submitted an open letter to Border Patrol, detailing Martin's full story, the agency's failure to act, and the volunteers' demands to improve search responses in the borderlands. The letter can be found here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AJdxFSZ9nYtEwZOtTlzVrrEgEYP5R-wq6xBjkPqMTw/edit?usp=sharing>

2 Pima County is not unique in their 911 system segregation: according to a 2016 report by the Police Executive Research Forum, all other southern Arizona counties in the Tucson Sector (Cochise, Maricopa, Santa Cruz, and Pinal) have a similar practice of transferring 911 calls from people profiled as undocumented to Border Patrol, as do counties in South Texas. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/respondingmigrantdeaths.pdf>

3 Pima County employs eight SAR coordinators. Taja Briana Davis, "A behind the scenes look at Pima County's search and rescue teams." <https://www.kgun9.com/news/local-news/a-behind-the-scenes-look-at-pima-county-s-search-and-rescue-teams>

4 SRDI: Southwest Rescue Dogs, Inc. is a "K-9 search and rescue organization that serves as a resource for the Pima County Sheriff's Department to use highly trained personnel and search dogs to find lost or injured people in inaccessible desert and mountain areas." Human members are medically trained in wilderness emergency care. SAMSAR is the Southern Arizona Mounted Search and Rescue, Inc. <http://sarci.org/>

5 An acronym used by law enforcement that means "Undocumented Alien."

6 For the calls we analyzed from 2016–2018, these calls were forwarded to a call center called the Joint Intelligence Operations Center. Currently, they are transferred to CBP's Arizona Air Coordination Center (A2C2). These two call centers appear to operate in the same way based on our review of calls from 2022.

7 In addition to instructing PCSD employees not to engage in profiling, their internal protocols specifically state that employees "shall not inquire about immigration status during consensual contacts."

8 In only 9% of calls, those in distress voluntarily self-identified to dispatchers as migrants, or explicitly asked to speak with Border Patrol. This pattern persists in our recent sampling of Pima County 911 records from June 2022, in which the vast majority of distressed callers were transferred to Border Patrol based on an extremely minimal interaction with a Spanish-speaking caller, rather than based on any explicit mention of immigration status.

9 DeShaney v. Winnebago County. Dept. of Soc. Servs., 489 US 189, 197 n. 3 [1989] (citing Yick Wo v. Hopkins, 118 US 356 [1886]).

10 See, e.g.: Graham v. Richardson, 403 U.S. 365, 376 [1971]; Truax v. Raich, 239 U.S. 33 [1915].

11 Elliot-Park v. Manglona, 592 F.3d 1003, 1007 [9th Cir. 2010].

12 Estate of Macias v. Ihde, 219 F.3d 1018, 1028 [9th Cir. 2000]. This ruling reversed a summary judgment where officials' provision of inferior police protection on account of a decedent's status as a woman, a Latina, and a victim of domestic violence, would violate her equal protection rights.

13 Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 [1945].

14 A caller with a "911-only" phone is carrying a cell phone that is not activated with a cell carrier, and therefore can only make outgoing 911 calls. At least 210 callers from our data set were calling from 911-only phones.

15 Lo, Puck. "For migrants in Arizona who call 911, It's Border Patrol on the line," Al Jazeera. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/25/for-migrants-in-arizona-who-call-911-its-border-patrol-on-the-line.html>

16 Significantly, this protocol leaves all cases originating from PCSD's Ajo call center at the discretion of the Ajo shift supervisor as to whether or not to notify the Search and Rescue unit. Thus, the changes in documentation and follow-up implemented by this new policy do not necessarily extend to calls received from the Ajo station, which receives just as high of a call volume as the Tucson station. It should also be noted that this protocol denies county

jurisdiction and therefore responsibility to conduct follow-up or search efforts for all calls coming from federal land, which includes vast swaths of the border zone that see very high numbers of migrant deaths. These calls are still transferred to Border Patrol with no recourse if Border Patrol does not search, as they fall into a gray zone where federal land managers do not search for migrants but Pima County also denies jurisdiction to search. See Appendix A for a copy of PCSD's Search and Rescue protocols as of June 26, 2020.

17 Spanish original: Llamé cuatro veces. Estamos muriendo.

18 PCSD internal email, 28 September 2016, Subject: "Handling Lost UDA Calls." Obtained via public records request.

19 Jill M. Williams. "From humanitarian exceptionalism to contingent care: Care and enforcement at the humanitarian border," *Political Geography*, Volume 47 [2015]: 11-20.

20 "Under U.S. domestic law, the right to emergency medical care regardless of ability to pay or immigration status is well established. In these laws, emergencies are defined as situations where the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably be expected to place the health of the individual in serious jeopardy. International human rights mechanisms also enjoin states to ensure that lifesaving emergency medical care is provided without discrimination." *Ibid.*

21 Ieva Jusionyte, *Threshold: Emergency Responders on the US-Mexico Border* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 15.

22 "On the ground, this multiplicity of factors converged, resulting in shifts in Border Patrol protocols for interacting with sick and injured migrants. Long-time BP agents report that beginning in 2005 they were instructed to begin establishing alienage of all migrants, even those in need of emergency medical attention...The act of establishing alienage made the Border Patrol, when the individual was undocumented, responsible for both their care (e.g., transportation to the hospital, financial costs associated with treatment) and their surveillance while being treated. In turn, Border Patrol agents now stay with sick or injured migrants from the moment they are encountered and throughout any hospital stay." Williams, 15-16.

# APPENDIX:

## PIMA COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT SEARCH AND RESCUE PROTOCOLS

**Pima County Sheriff's Department Parks Enforcement/Search and Rescue Unit  
Standard Operating Procedures**

**VIII. SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS IN AJO**

- A. Search and Rescue calls in the Ajo District will be referred to the Ajo District Commander, or the on-duty Shift supervisor in Ajo.
- B. The Ajo District Commander, or Shift Supervisor, will determine if the PE/SAR Unit should be advised.
- C. If Ajo personnel can manage the operation, they may assume the responsibilities of the Mission Coordinator. In conducting such operations, a base camp will be established, the Ajo Emergency Rescue Services should be advised and Ajo resources called out as required.
- D. The District Commander, or Shift Supervisor, may call out a PE/SAR member to direct the operation. The Mission Coordinator should utilize the Ajo Emergency Rescue Services and other resources as needed.

**IX. SEARCH AND RESCUE OPERATIONS ON STATE OR FEDERAL LAND**

- A. It is the responsibility of the Mission Coordinator to ensure that proper notifications are made for SAR incidents that occur on state or federal land. For the safety of the victim, appropriate resource allocation management for SAR response can be initiated before notifications are made. The notifications should be made as soon as possible and can be made by Communications at the request of the Mission Coordinator.
- B. National Parks/Monuments
  1. For SAR incidents occurring within National Parks/Monuments, the response will be coordinated between the Mission Coordinator and a National Park Service Ranger unless one of the following occurs:
    - a. There is not a NPS officer readily available or on-duty.
    - b. The NPS officer allows the Mission Coordinator to function as the Incident Commander.
  2. If a NPS Ranger is not available, the SAR response may proceed without delay, with notification to the Tactical Response Commander.
- C. Indian Reservations
  1. SAR incidents which occur on Indian Reservation land should be directed to the United States Customs and Border Enforcement BORSTAR Unit.

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2. Any request to conduct or assist in SAR missions on Indian Reservations must be approved by the Specialized Response Division Commander.

**D. U.S. Forest Service Land**

1. Response to SAR missions that occur within National Forest Boundaries do not require additional approval. (Existing IGA)
2. The Sabino Canyon Visitor Center or U.S.F.S. Coronado Dispatch shall be notified in the event helicopters will be taking off or landing within the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area.

**E. Lost Person Response**

Once PCSD receives the 911 call from the lost person requesting assistance, Communications should attempt to determine if this is within our response jurisdiction, and if in a remote or metropolitan area.

1. For Metro area response within PCSD jurisdiction:
  - a. Dispatch to Patrol for immediate response
    - i. Patrol will determine if any additional resources are needed, such as Air and Search and Rescue
2. For Remote area response:
  - a. Communications to determine if this is within PCSD response jurisdiction
    - i. If this incident is within another jurisdiction (full emergency response capabilities; ex. Tohono O'odham/Pasqua Yaqui), Communications will transfer the call to the appropriate jurisdiction
      1. Communications to also advise that jurisdiction to the location of the lost person.
      - ii. If this incident is within another jurisdiction (without emergency response capabilities; ex. National Parks/National Monuments, USFS, BLM, etc)
        1. Make notification to BORSTAR and advise them the applicable jurisdiction was also notified.
        2. Generate a call number for "Lost Person" documenting, within CAD, both the BORSTAR

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- transfer of call and advisory to appropriate response agency.
- b. Communications will assign the call to the on-duty/on-call Search and Rescue staff member. The staff member will contact the land area point of contact to confirm receipt of information and offer assistance, if needed.
3. If this incident is within PCSD response jurisdiction (remote):
- a. Notify BORSTAR for response, provide our call number, and request disposition of search results
- i. PESAR supervisor advise of call via phone
- ii. Generate a call number for "Lost Person", documenting with CAD, both the BORSTAR transfer of call and advisory to PESAR supervisor
- iii. If PESAR supervisor determines PESAR response is necessary, communications will assign the call the responding unit.
- iv. If no PESAR response, communications annotate in CAD and will close the call with 51.01P and await disposition from BORSTAR
- v. Communications to advise PESAR supervisors of disposition, if returned
- vi. Upon receiving disposition of BORSTAR's efforts of search will determine PCSD response.
1. Disposition: **Found**- Document in CAD with USBP reference/case number and close call using 51.01P UCR code.
2. Disposition: **Unable to Locate**- Document in CAD and phone call notification to PESAR Supervisor for response coordination.
- a. Assign to responding PESAR Deputy
- b. Deputies should consider Air for area check.
3. Disposition: **Insufficient Information**- Document in CAD and phone call notification to PESAR supervisor to evaluate, initiate and coordinate possible PCSD search effort.

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- a. Assign call to responding PESAR Deputy
- b. If available, Air to complete area check
4. PESAR supervisors to contact BORSTAR at 3 hours to follow-up on any active Lost Persons calls with no return response.

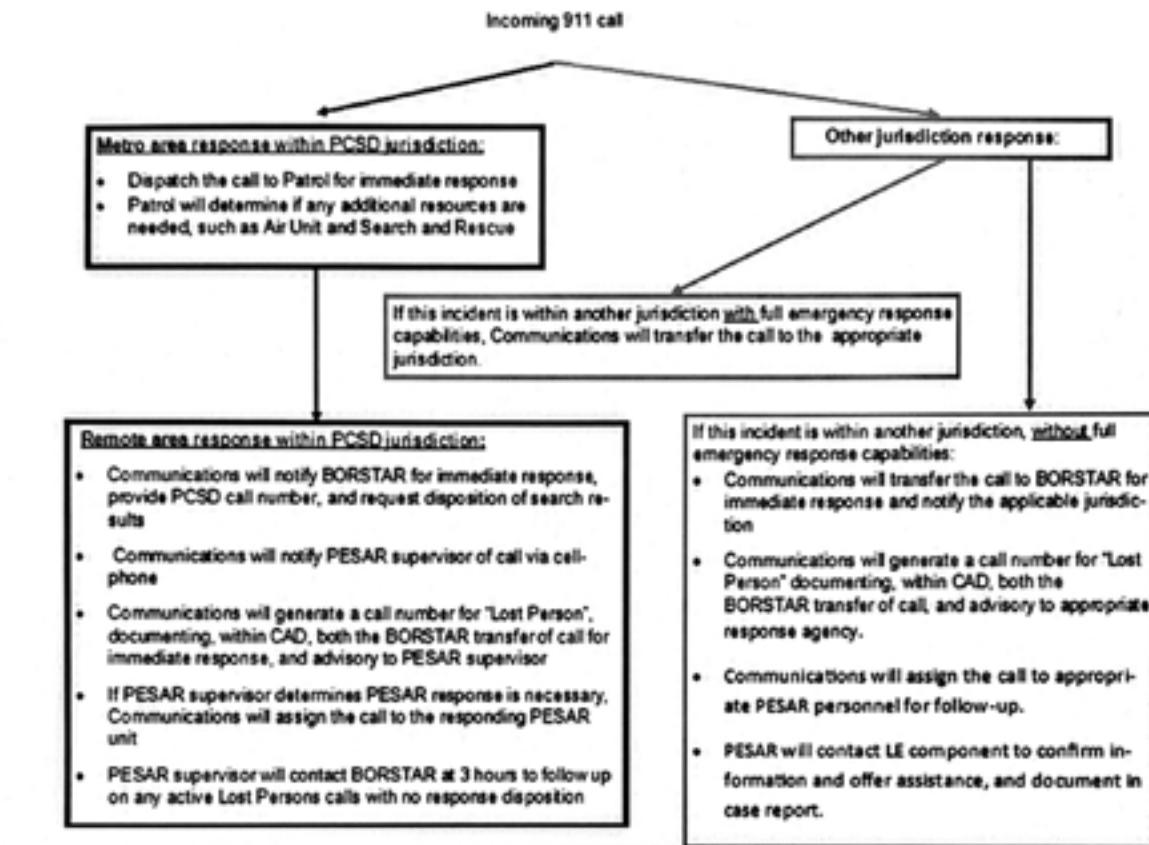
If there is a missed disposition which was not relayed to PCSD Communications, PESAR Supervisors is to contact Communications to have disposition update entered into the call text.

4. Case Management for Lost Person(s):

- a. The 51.01 clearances will be most encountered by Homicide cases as "Missing Person" and PESAR as "Lost Person"
  - i. Both supervisors of the Homicide and PESAR units will be responsible for their appropriate cases and follow appropriate Case Management procedures.
    1. PESAR cases will most likely show coordinates as the location, whereas the Missing Person cases for Homicide will most likely show address.
    - ii. All PESAR related cases will be updated with BORSTAR Disposition, and/or the PCSD response with final disposition.
      1. PESAR is identified in Case Management as "PSAR" detail
    - iii. If sufficient information about the missing person is obtained through the investigation, the person will be entered in to the NCIC as a "Missing Person"

## Pima County Sheriff's Department Parks Enforcement/Search and Rescue Unit Standard Operating Procedures

### Lost Person Response



## X. HELICOPTER OPERATIONS

- A. All PE/SAR members shall be trained in basic helicopter operations as well as heli-rappel and short haul operations.
- B. Initial training and certification shall be provided by Pima County Sheriff's Department Tactical Air Support Unit.
- C. In addition to training and certification with the Pima County Sheriff's Department Air Support Unit, certifications on heli-rappel and short haul operations will be completed with the Arizona Department of Public Safety (AZ DPS) Aviation Bureau.
- D. Only those PE/SAR members who are current in heli-rappel and short haul certifications shall be allowed to perform those operations. Certification is valid for one-hundred twenty (120) days.

No More Deaths  
No Más Muertes

