

## A Texas Police Chief Says Border Wall Money Would Be Better Spent Fighting Crime In US Cities

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US politicians are wasting time and money seeking funding for a border wall that could be better spent assisting law enforcement in big cities, a Texas police chief said Wednesday.

Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo spoke to reporters about combating gang and gun violence on Wednesday, following the [murder of 7-year-old Jazmine Barnes](#) last week. He challenged state and federal lawmakers to stop the "political theater" about a nonexistent border crisis and instead focus efforts on fighting crime where it is actually happening in the US.

The comments put the police chief of America's fourth-largest city in direct opposition to the White House, which on Wednesday [released an ominous video](#) insisting that the "crisis on the border is real."

"If you look across the United States, the public safety threat is not on the border. The public safety threat is on the streets of our cities," Acevedo said.

The chief, who also leads the Major Cities Chiefs Police Association, responded specifically to a [tweet by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott](#) calling out Barnes' alleged killing by a gang member. Abbott's tweet called for expanding the Texas Anti-Gang Task Force in Houston "to clean our streets of this trash and restore safety."

Acevedo said he would welcome additional state money to put more officers on the streets. But he also panned Abbott's decision to spend almost a billion dollars of state money on a "border surge" — money that Acevedo claimed has not helped reduce crime in the state.

"The evidence and intelligence and data will show us that all the money that's being spent on the border by the state of Texas, while it's great for primary politics, it's money that belongs in the big cities so we can combat violent crime," he said. "Had you taken that money and given it to big cities across the state and our partners in rural areas, we would have had a much better result in terms of public safety."

Acevedo called on lawmakers to expand gun background checks and create a system to keep firearms from domestic abusers and people whose mental illness could pose a danger to others.

"That's the kind of stuff that's going to have tremendous impact," he said.

As for the border, Acevedo pointed out that crime in those areas of Texas was low before the state's "border surge" and has remained low since. Analysis by the Cato Institute released Tuesday backed up those conclusions, finding that violent crime, homicide, and property crime rates were lower in US border counties than in the country as a whole.

Moreover, a physical barrier would not stem the flow of illegal drugs coming into the US from Mexico, Acevedo said, pointing out that most illicit drugs enter through official ports of entry, where fencing already exists.

"It's really frustrating, I think, for police chiefs," he said. "It's frustrating for us when we see a big debate about \$5.7 billion that we want to put on the border for fencing when we already have fencing."

And, he added, border security won't make a difference to gang violence in cities.

"The majority of gang members are home-grown, natural-born, red-blooded Americans," he said. "The vast majority of gang members are not undocumented immigrants."

In December, Tucson's police chief testified before members of the Senate that a border wall would not solve safety issues at the border in Arizona. The sheriff of Pima County, Arizona, has similarly said that a border wall would not be effective, particularly in mountainous areas along the state's border with Mexico.

On Wednesday, Acevedo said he hoped he and other law enforcement leaders could inspire a change in the national conversation: "We need to educate ourselves on the facts."