We, the undersigned, call on the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice to end the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) at all points along the United States-México border in light of the global pandemic of COVID-19 and parole all people currently enrolled in MPP into the United States where it is possible to safely practice isolation and stay at home to prevent further outbreak of the virus.

1. The MPP program has created a situation in several large northern Mexican cities where people with immigration court dates in the United States live in varying stages of housing insecurity such as in tents in encampments along the border; shelters; and hotels. Clustered tightly and without regular access to hand washing with soap and disinfectant, these settings have made it unnecessarily difficult for residents to practice WHO-, CDC-, and Mexican Secretary of Health-recommended precautions such as social isolation, regular hand washing and hygiene. Lack of access to isolation and sanitation has been linked by the CDC to spreading of the highly contagious virus in settings such as the encampments along the border and other vulnerable living situations that MPP has caused.

2. People infected in encampments on the border could easily pass it not just to one another but to the American and Mexican public. Since the Department of Justice has not called off hearings for people enrolled in MPP as of March 18, 2020, asylum seekers must cross the border to report to court on a near daily basis. During this process, guards, transportation staff, court staff, CBP officers, and other personnel are at greater risk for contracting the virus and spreading it to communities inside the United States and Mexico, as well as conversely passing the virus to people enrolled in MPP. This can be prevented by allowing people enrolled in MPP to enter the United States where they can practice recommended prevention measures while awaiting future hearings.

3. Detention is not a preventative option for anyone, since there have been outbreaks of other infectious diseases in ICE detention centers in recent months, which affected inmates as well as facility staff and personnel, and is an unnecessary risk to spread the virus. DHS should immediately parole people in the MPP program into the United States where they can safely take measures to slow the spread of the virus.

4. The government of México has shown itself to be alarmingly slow to respond to the pandemic. As recently as this past weekend, as countries around the world urged people to practice social distancing and limit physical contact, President Lopez Obrador was flouting this guidance. Health care infrastructure in northern Mexican cities is not prepared to handle a
spread of the infection and is underprepared and under resourced. Were an epidemic of COVID-19 to start in border encampments, it would spread quickly to the general population.

5. **Recent studies suggest** that COVID-19 affects children differently than adults. While young children tend to show less severe symptoms than adults, very young children and infants infected with the virus show severe symptoms at high rates, and some have died. **There are thousands of children and infants** currently subject to the MPP program. Failure to act to protect the best interest of the child will be generational.

6. Many countries, **including the United States and Canada**, have taken efforts to reduce border traffic in an effort to contain the disease. While this measure is done ostensibly to effect a quarantine among nations to slow the pandemic, people enrolled in MPP are being forced to cross the US-México border to comply with court orders. Ending the MPP program would allow people to continue to carry out the asylum process in a much safer manner.

As practitioners, we urge the United States to take responsible steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The consequences of failing to halt the virus along the US-México border could result in great suffering and likely death for adults as well as children and infants. The United States government should take every preventative measure possible to slow down the virus, including immediately and permanently ending MPP.