

Border Patrol Agents as Interpreters Along the Northern Border: Unwise Policy, Illegal Practice

By [Lisa Graybill](#) [1]

Advocates along the Northern Border report a recent, sharp increase in the use of U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) agents to provide interpretation services to state and local law enforcement officers and emergency responders. This most often occurs when an officer or responder encounters an individual who does not speak English and proactively reaches out to USBP for assistance. But it has also occurred when USBP agents respond to an incident report in lieu of, or in addition to, local law enforcement officers. In other cases, USBP agents have reportedly begun responding to 911 emergency assistance calls, especially if the caller is known or perceived not to speak English. Much of this activity appears to have been precipitated by the fact that the U.S.-Canada border has undergone a dramatic transformation, including an influx of newly assigned USBP agents.

Immigrants, their advocates, and community members are reporting—and official statistics confirm—that there are simply too many USBP agents on the ground, apparently with too much time on their hands, who lack adherence to stated priorities.

This special report by Lisa Graybill for the Immigration Policy Center lays out the problems with border patrol agents serving as translators and make recommendations intended to promote Title VI compliance, maintain the integrity of the USBP mission on the Northern Border, and protect the rights of immigrants and their families who call the Northern Border home.

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