



DHS Budget for Fiscal Year 2023: A Blank Check for Mass Surveillance

In FY 2023, the Biden administration seeks to [expand](#) the DHS budget to an unprecedented \$97.3 billion – the largest ever in the agency’s history. This budget request includes **more than \$2 billion dollars** for CBP and ICE surveillance alone. This funding includes a massive expansion of inhumane border surveillance technologies and ICE’s electronic monitoring program. Unfortunately, this boom in military tech funding is the result of the Biden administration continuing to promote the myth that border surveillance is a “gentler” and “[smart](#)” alternative to Trump’s policies.¹ In reality, these technologies fuel mass government surveillance at the border and far into the interior, and create lasting physical and emotional [trauma](#) for immigrant communities. This brief highlights key parts of DHS’s budget request for surveillance.

I. Massive Funding for Digital Border Wall is Dangerous and Deadly

In FY 2023, CBP alone requested over \$1 billion to carry out surveillance of communities at the border and beyond. *See* Appendix for breakdown of this request. This funding will not only [line the pockets](#) of military tech and surveillance companies, it will also further criminalize immigrant and border communities.² This major investment in border surveillance includes:

- **\$465.6 million** for **aerial surveillance**, including surveillance blimps, drones, military-grade helicopters and other aircrafts; aircraft sensors, data fusion and radar equipment;
- **\$234.6 million** for the **National Vetting Center (NVC)**, a unit created under President Trump that carries out real-time automated surveillance of immigrant communities, including social media surveillance, and for the **National Targeting Center (NTC) and NTC’s Counter Division Network**, which has been criticized for [privacy and human rights violations](#) such as surveillance of journalists, NGO workers, and Congress;
- **\$160.4 million** for the technology infrastructure, such as **data analytics and visualization, real-time data sharing, law enforcement mobile surveillance apps, and predictive analytics**, that makes it possible for CBP to collect and share all of its surveillance data across DHS and with other federal agencies;
- **\$67.3 million** for **vehicle surveillance**, including border patrol vehicles and vehicle-mounted surveillance cameras, radars, lasers, and GPS systems;
- **\$13.5 million** to operate and upgrade the **over 700 surveillance towers** at the Northern and Southern borders, including 204 Autonomous Surveillance Towers.

Millions of dollars will also fund an entry/exit biometrics surveillance program as well as ground and tunnel sensors at the border. *See* Appendix for full list.

¹ See Felipe de la Hoz, Why Biden’s ‘Virtual’ Border Could Be Worse Than Trump’s Wall, *The Nation* (Jan. 22, 2021), <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/biden-immigration-sur>.

² A number of these military and technology companies have troubling records around human rights, civil rights and privacy. *See* Just Futures Law and Mijente, “The Deadly Digital Border Wall,” Oct. 2021, https://notechforice.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Deadly.Digital.Border.Wall_.pdf

Far from being a “humane” alternative, border technologies deepen surveillance and criminalization of communities of color, including immigrants, along the Southwest and Northern borders and throughout the interior. These technologies have proven deadly for migrants who are increasingly pushed to take more dangerous routes, including to avoid targeting by surveillance technologies. [Research](#) has shown that there is “significant correlation between the location of border surveillance technology, the routes taken by migrants, and the locations of recovered human remains in the southern Arizona desert.” Fiscal Year 2021 marked the [highest number of migrant deaths](#) at the Southwest border in recorded history at **557 migrant deaths**.

II. Over Half a Billion Dollars for ICE Digital Prisons Expands E-Carceration

Far from dismantling ICE, at **\$8.1 billion**, Biden’s FY 2023 ICE budget is still millions more than ICE’s budget in [FY18](#), the same year that Trump enacted a “zero tolerance” policy that brought greater visibility to family separation.

One of the hallmarks of ICE’s budget request is its so-called “Alternatives to Detention” (ATD) program, also known as the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP), which subjects immigrant communities to continuous surveillance using electronic ankle shackles, smartphone applications, facial recognition technology and more. In FY 2023, the **\$527 million** ATD budget request **represents a nearly 20% increase** from FY 2022. In two years, the number of people ICE has subjected to ATD [has more than doubled to 227,000 individuals](#) as of April 2022. Continuing this rapid investment in the e-carceration of immigrant communities, the 2023 ATD budget will also provide funding to adopt new forms of immigrant surveillance.

While ISAP is labeled as an “alternative” to a physical cage, it is another form of detention. ISAP technologies are highly invasive, [disruptive to daily life](#) and [physically harmful](#). In February 2022, [twenty-five members of Congress](#) wrote a letter to ICE expressing concerns regarding the drastic expansion of the ISAP program. In May, Just Futures Law, Mijente, Community Justice Exchange and dozens of national and local community organizations issued a report, [Tracked and Trapped: Experiences from ICE Digital Prisons](#), which documents firsthand the harms of electronic surveillance under ISAP.

III. Unprecedented Biometric Surveillance Database Supercharges Deportations

With the help of companies like Amazon, DHS is building the largest biometric surveillance database in the U.S., called HART (the Homeland Advanced Recognition Technology system), which will create unprecedented surveillance capabilities for its deportation efforts. **For FY 2023, DHS is requesting \$38.1 million for HART and \$23.4 million for HART Operations** (cloud storage, contractor services, etc.).

HART will [supercharge deportations](#) and enable “[unfettered](#)” government surveillance of immigrants and residents. The database will provide immigration enforcement and other law enforcement with detailed surveillance profiles on **270 million people**, including juveniles, and will provide intimate information about people’s physical features and characteristics, DNA profiles, relationships, daily routines, and social media activity. HART will store **6.7 million iris pairs** and approximately **1.1 billion face images**. The information stored in HART will often be collected without people’s knowledge or consent, and will be shared with other law enforcement agencies within and beyond the U.S.

IV. Expansion of HSI Technology Funding Deepens DHS Surveillance Capabilities

HSI, the main investigative arm of DHS, will increase its budget by **\$162 million** in 2023, to a total of **\$2.3 billion**. This expansion includes a heavy focus on technology. Mijente and Just Futures Law have previously [uncovered](#) that HSI has been the main driver of ICE’s use of Clearview AI, a controversial and deeply invasive facial recognition company that scrapes surveillance data from social media profiles and other sources.

While the specific funding for Clearview AI in 2023 is unclear, the budget [notes](#) software and technology as a “key issue,” and includes items such as:

- **\$58.8 million** total for “cybercrime technology enhancement,” including to purchase new and “emerging” technologies;
- A new surveillance platform called RAVEn that will be the “primary investigative analytics tool” for HSI agents. Tech giants such as Amazon, Google, and Microsoft are [competing](#) to build and maintain this platform, which “targets people not authorized to work in the U.S. by mining social-media information, and processing surveillance footage and biometric data.”

Rather than moving massive sums of government funds to the for-profit border surveillance industry, we continue to call on Congress and the Biden administration to invest in communities. The FY 2023 budget represents increased militarization at the border and beyond, equipping law enforcement with new and unchecked powers to surveil communities using their cell phones, vehicles, aircrafts, towers, ground sensors and surveillance databases – on land, at sea, in the air, at the border, and over the internet. It is long past time to divest from DHS surveillance, [listen to](#) border communities, and redirect funding into community safety and health.

Writers: Carey Shenkman, Hannah Lucal

Editor: Julie Mao

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APPENDIX

DHS is requesting **over \$1 billion** for CBP surveillance technology in FY 2023. This includes:

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (\$1,010,055,000)	
Amount	Purpose
\$63,200,000	Border Enforcement Coordination Network (BECN) <i>BECN merges with Border Patrol Enforcement Systems (BPES) and provides real-time data sharing, detection, classification, and visualization of border activity.</i>
\$11,715,000	Team Awareness Kits (TAKs) <i>A mobile app that provides USBP real-time access to surveillance tower data, drone data, “visualization of geo-points, pictures, maps, overlays, routes, trails, and geo-fences.”</i>
\$86,488,000	3 Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft (MEA) <i>Deployed in the Northern and Southern Borders and maritime environments and equipped with The Minotaur Mission Management System, which links sensors, cameras, radars, etc.</i>
\$13,000,000	Aircraft Sensors
\$36,700,000	Common Operating Picture (COP) <i>Analyzes sensor data, detects people or objects and sends the data to USBP.</i>
\$48,991,000	Border Patrol Vehicles
\$2,000,000	Cross Border Tunnel Threat (CBTT)
\$24,900,000	Incident Driven Video Recording Systems (IDVRS) <i>1500 body-worn cameras; 100 vehicle-mounted cameras; \$9.5M for Axon technologies.</i>
\$13,500,000	Surveillance Towers <i>Sustains/upgrades 723 Towers at the Northern and Southern borders.</i>
\$1,200,000	Linear Ground Detection System (LGDS) <i>In-ground surveillance sensors at the border.</i>
\$12,643,000	Mobile Surveillance Capability (MSC) on vehicles <i>Vehicle-mounted radars, cameras, lasers, and GPS, covering 8-12 kilometer range.</i>
\$5,710,000	Mobile Video Surveillance System on vehicles <i>Vehicle-mounted camera sensors and lasers in urban and remote border areas.</i>
\$5,113,000	Surveillance Drones
\$17,439,000	In-ground Sensors
\$186,411,000	National Targeting Center (NTC)
\$17,577,000	Counter Network Division (subdivision of NTC) <i>Funding will integrate “publicly available information” into intelligence and data analysis. This program was recently criticized for carrying out domestic surveillance of journalists, government officials, NGO workers, and members of Congress.³</i>
\$30,668,000	National Vetting Center <i>The Trump Administration created this “extreme vetting” program driven by anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment. It has been criticized as redundant and further fueling bias towards Muslim communities and communities of color.⁴</i>

³ See Jana Winter, Operation Whistle Pig: Inside the secret CBP unit with no rules that investigates Americans, Yahoo News, December 11, 2021, <https://news.yahoo.com/operation-whistle-pig-inside-the-secret-cbp-unit-with-no-rules-that-investigates-americans-100000147.html>

⁴ See Chinmayi Sharma, The National Vetting Enterprise: Artificial Intelligence and Immigration Enforcement, Lawfare, Jan 8, 2019, <https://www.lawfare-blog.com/national-vetting-enterprise-artificial-intelligence-and-immigration-enforcement/>; Brennan Center, Caution Warranted on Trump’s National Vetting Center, Jan.

\$17,337,000	Analytical Framework for Intelligence <i>Indexes data in existing systems and assists CBP “in identifying non-obvious relationships.”</i>
\$62,824,000	Sensor-Equipped Surveillance Helicopter <i>Sensors can be “fused to an intelligence center” accessed by federal, state, and local law enforcement.</i>
\$22,776,000	Surveillance Aircraft <i>Shares data with DHS, Dept. of Defense and others and surveils coastal/maritime boundaries in the U.S., Caribbean, and Latin America.</i>
\$99,955,000	Marine Surveillance Aircrafts <i>Deployed at the U.S. border and in Central and South America.</i>
\$70,722,000	Sensors + Radars on Drones + Aircrafts (Military Grade) <i>Includes Vehicle and Dismount Exploitation Radar (VADER) to detect people and vehicles from aircrafts and drones. This military-grade technology is used by the U.S. Army.⁵</i>
\$41,171,000	Aerostat Surveillance (Surveillance Blimp)⁶ <i>Deployed at the U.S.-Mexico border, Florida Straits, and southwestern approaches to Puerto Rico.</i>
\$23,330,000	New Maritime Surveillance Blimp <i>To be deployed near South Padre Island, TX. Two future blimps are planned for Southern California and the Florida Keys.</i>
\$4,860,000	Sensor Data + Data Fusion on Aircrafts + Vessels <i>Minotaur Mission Management System (MMS)</i>
\$20,528,000	2 Light-Enforcement Platform Surveillance Helicopters
\$14,849,000	UH-60L Black Hawk Helicopter Conversion (Military Grade)⁷
\$8,900,000	Sensor, Data, Telecommunications Operations for Air and Marine Operations Surveillance System (AMOSS) <i>Integrates sensors, law enforcement databases, open-source information, and an extensive communications network for DHS and CBP.</i>
\$22,508,000	Advanced Trade Analytics Platform (ATAP) <i>Data source for all of CBP’s trade related data; includes predictive and prescriptive analytics.</i>
\$10,756,000	Contraband Detection Surveillance System <i>Non-Intrusive Inspection System (NII) image identification technology. CBP previously used this technology on cargo and is now experimenting with using it on people as well.⁸</i>
\$12,284,000	Entry/Exit Biometric Surveillance Programs

8, 2019, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/caution-warranted-trumps-national-vetting-center>. This funds the development of the Automated Targeting System. See DHS, DHS/CBP/PIA-006: Automated Targeting System, May 2022, <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/automated-targeting-system-ats-update>

5 See John Keller, Northrop to operate man-hunting airborne radar system for operations in Afghanistan, Dec. 12, 2013 <https://www.militaryaerospace.com/trusted-computing/article/16715692/northrop-to-operate-manhunting-airborne-radar-system-for-operations-in-afghanistan>.

6 See CBP, Air and Marine Operations Tethered Aerostat Radar System (TARS), Aug. 2021, https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2021-Aug/TARS_508%20compliant.pdf

7 See UH-60A/L Black Hawk Helicopter, Military.com, <https://www.military.com/equipment/uh-60a-l-black-hawk>.

8 See DHS, DHS/CBP/PIA-017 Non-Intrusive Inspection Systems Program, Oct. 6, 2021, <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/non-intrusive-inspection-systems-program>