January 16, 2018

Robert Miller, AIA
AIA Arizona Board + 2018 President
Professor; Director
University of Arizona, School of Architecture
PO Box 210075
1040 North Olive Road
Tucson, AZ 85721

Dear Robert:

The American Institute of Architects, California Council (AIACC) is deeply interested in the topic of border security and the effective regulation of the frontier between the United States of America and Mexico. We agree that rule-based, transparent and efficient management of the movement of people, goods and investment between Mexico and the U.S. is vital to our shared well-being.

The international crossings between San Diego and Tijuana are among the world’s busiest, reflecting the long history of settlement, migration and commerce in the region and its emergence as a global economic leader. This has led to large, diverse populations on both sides of the border – with many people connected by family, culture, language and business – leading to robust and economically beneficial bilateral relationships and contributing to the prosperity of our members.

The AIACC, working with AIA San Diego (the local AIA chapter most directly impacted by this issue) has carefully considered ways to reduce the entry to the United States of persons without documented legal status. At a time when the need for public investment in infrastructure is particularly acute, any efforts to reduce uninspected entry of individuals to the U.S. should consider several issues. Specifically, any solution should use scarce resources wisely, be humane, consider environmental concerns, be mindful of our long relationship with a friendly neighbor, and align with American values. The complex and spirited public debate about immigration policy, including largely misplaced concerns about the alleged criminality of undocumented migrants, means that creating a balanced response to the problem will require political leadership. Many elected officials in border states, representing both major political parties, have bravely offered that, arguing against excessive investment in physical barriers that would damage their natural landscapes, economies and communities without providing
commensurate benefits. Further, the impact of the construction of a physical barrier will have a lasting effect on the natural environment in that region and given the architects’ innate responsibility to protect the fragile interface between the natural and built environment, we have an obligation to assess the real impact of this project.

We urge those considering how to better limit the entry of undocumented people and contraband to the United States from Mexico to weigh carefully the actual extent and cost of the current problem against the significant cultural, political and economic benefits we now derive from our relationship. One-size-fits-all, sea-to-sea barrier solutions have the very real potential to harm – both in terms of our self-interest as well as a significant impact on the natural environment. We urge a thoughtful, measured approach to securing the border with Mexico that serves both our nation’s security concerns as well as its values.

Sincerely,

Jana Itzen, AIA