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FLORIDA SHERIFFS ASSOCIATION

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March 25, 2020

The Honorable Rick Scott
United States Senate
716 Senate Hart Senate Office
Building Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Marco
Rubio United States Senate
284 Russell Senate Office
Building Washington, DC 20510

Re: Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Program

Dear Senator Scott and Senator Rubio:

The Florida Sheriffs Association, comprised of 67 elected County Sheriffs in the state of Florida, are unified in our support of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program. As you are aware, this nation is in the midst of a significant drug problem, which threatens the future of our youth and our country as a whole. Toxic drugs such as methamphetamine, synthetics, hallucinogens and cocaine can only be mitigated through a national strategy. We are currently in the grips of a burgeoning opioid/heroin emergency. The sobering reality is that drug-induced deaths have surpassed motor vehicle deaths every year since 2009.

The HIDTA program is best administered by ONDCP given its unbiased and neutral position. ONDCP is a key component in bringing Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement together and has the important responsibility of establishing priorities and objectives for the nation's drug control strategy. The long-standing law enforcement partnerships facilitated by the HIDTA program are an essential component of an effective national drug control strategy.

The President issued his 2021 Budget Proposal for the U.S. Government in mid-February. The proposal recommends moving the HIDTA program and all grant oversight from ONDCP to the Department of Justice, specifically to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). This proposal would potentially be the end of a long and successful program. The state, local, tribal and other Federal agencies, who currently have a seat and an equal vote at HIDTA Executive Boards across the country, would be negatively impacted. Each HIDTA's Executive Board is comprised of an equal number of Federal (50%), and state and local (50%) criminal justice leaders, which ensures a balanced and equal voice in

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identifying the regional threat, developing a strategy, investing in the strategy, and in assessing performance. These partnerships created on each Executive Board allow HIDTAs to focus on the drug threats specific to their area and are the cornerstone of the HIDTA program, ensuring neutrality. HIDTA's success is predicated on the results of a multi-agency partnership, not the directives of one specific agency and especially not to an agency that competes with the other agencies for HIDTA grant funds. Under the current proposal guidance, the Executive Board will no longer determine the budget and priorities, and the Director would not report to the Executive Board.

In our state, the positive impacts of ONDCP/HIDTA are undeniable. In 2019, HIDTA funds and coordinates regional task forces which have disrupted and dismantled 150 drug trafficking and money laundering organizations. The Florida HIDTA Initiatives removed 5,869 drug traffickers and violent offenders, 45.6 tons of cocaine, 1523 pounds of methamphetamine and 366 pounds of heroin from our communities, and removed 1,106 firearms associated with criminal organizations. Our state is provided the added benefit of HIDTA training and intelligence components as well as participation in the Domestic Highway Enforcement Program, which successfully removed \$49.6M worth of drugs and more than \$1M in illegally obtained cash and assets in 2018. HIDTA provides our law enforcement agencies with nationwide connectivity with other HIDTAs, increasing the exchange of intelligence and information, and enhancing joint investigations. Prevention programs in our communities play a significant role in addressing the drug problem. ONDCP's Drug Free Communities (DFC) programs are evidence-based examples of successful models. HIDTA and DFCs have an excellent partnership in addressing drug overdose deaths in Florida. Both should remain under ONDCP.

On behalf of the Florida Sheriffs Association, criminal justice professionals and the citizens they serve, we ask for your continued support of ONDCP, HIDTA, and the Drug Free Communities (DFC) programs. There is no valid reason to risk the goodwill between state/local law enforcement and our Federal partners by putting the HIDTA Program under the control and purview of one of its constituent Federal partnering agencies. The perception alone is enough to change the environment of goodwill that has been built between agencies through the unique and highly successful HIDTA Program.

Respectfully,



Bob Gualtieri

Sheriff of Pinellas County & President of the Florida Sheriffs Association

Copies to:

House Appropriations Committee-Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee
The Honorable Mike Quigley, Chair
The Honorable José Serrano, Vice Chair
The Honorable Tom Graves, Ranking Member
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

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Senate Appropriations Committee-Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee
The Honorable John Kennedy, Chair
The Honorable Christopher Coons, Ranking Member
Room S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

House Appropriations Committee-Commerce, Justice, and Science and Related Agencies Subcommittee
The Honorable José Serrano, Chair
The Honorable Robert Aderholt, Ranking Member
H-307, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chair
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform-Government Operations Subcommittee
The Honorable Gerald Connolly, Chair
The Honorable Mark Meadows, Ranking Member
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515