



MAJOR CITIES CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

April 24, 2019

The Honorable John Kennedy
Chairman

Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Coons
Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Quigley
Chairman

Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government Committee on Appropriations
2000 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Graves
Ranking Member

Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government Committee on Appropriations
2000 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kennedy, Ranking Member Coons, Chairman Quigley, and Ranking Member Graves:

On behalf of the largest law enforcement agencies in the Nation – Major Cities Chiefs Association (MCCA) – I am very concerned about the President’s Fiscal Year 2020 request to slash the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) by more than 90%, including removing two critical programs and cutting salary and expenses dramatically. We need ONDCP’s leadership more than ever.

As you know, ONDCP oversees and manages the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and the Drug Free Communities (DFC) programs. The mission of the HIDTA program is to disrupt the market for illegal drugs by dismantling or disrupting drug trafficking organizations through the coordinated efforts of federal, state, and local law enforcement. The DFCs provide critical drug prevention funding directly to community coalitions capable of reducing youth drug use.

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We sincerely appreciate the recent commitment by Congress and the Administration to invest significant taxpayer dollars to address our nation's drug crisis; however, this proposal would effectively dismantle ONDCP at a time when it is needed the most.

Included in the President's budget is a proposal that will cut ONDCP's budget and move the HIDTA and DFC programs to other federal agencies. Under the proposal, the HIDTA program would be overseen by the Drug Enforcement Administration and similarly the DFC program would be moved to SAMSA. **The Major Cities Chiefs Association strongly opposes any attempt to move either the HIDTA or DFC programs out of ONDCP. Moving these programs would effectively "cut the legs" out from underneath ONDCP thereby rendering them inefficient and ineffective.**

The HIDTA program is an essential component of the National Drug Control Strategy, and it is clear that federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement plays an integral role in a balanced strategy to reduce drug misuse and its harmful consequences. The HIDTA program enhances and coordinates federal, state, local, and tribal anti-drug misuse efforts from a local, regional, and national perspective, leveraging resources at all levels in a true partnership. The HIDTA program gives federal, state, local, and tribal criminal justice leaders a balanced and equal voice in identifying the regional threat, developing a strategy, investing in the strategy, and assessing performance. This unique feature of the HIDTA program creates the ability for each HIDTA to quickly, effectively, and efficiently adapt to emerging threats that may be unique to a given region providing for the greatest level of impact. Moving the HIDTA program out of ONDCP would all but eliminate the balanced voice found in the long-standing law enforcement partnerships, and the many other innovative approaches that are essential components of an effective drug policy.

The DFC program is the only federal drug prevention program that goes directly to communities to deal with all of their most pressing local drug issues. Accordingly, it is unique in that it requires participation of all community sectors, across the supply-demand reduction split to plan, implement, and evaluate locally tailored comprehensive strategies capable of dealing with the full range of drug issues and trends, including opioids, meth, synthetics, and marijuana. The program requires a local match in order to leverage all available resources, and the DFC program has a consistent track record in greatly reducing youth drug use in funded communities to levels lower than national averages through its data drive, comprehensive, multi-sector approach. Moving the DFC program out of the ONDCP would reduce its effectiveness by markedly limiting the full range of essential partners, to include local law enforcement, that is needed to continue to achieve the impressive population level reductions in youth drug use rates. It would also undermine the robust data collection and evaluation components of the program, which are fully managed and funded by ONDCP.

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Not only would such a move drastically weaken these vitally important programs, and force them to compete for priority, direction, and funding in larger agencies with competing and higher priorities, but it would significantly impact ONDCP's ability to effectively carry out its mission. ONDCP oversees federal efforts to combat every drug problem facing our nation, to include the opioid overdose epidemic, methamphetamines, synthetic drugs, cocaine, marijuana, etc., by coordinating all federal agencies responsible for reducing drug trafficking and misuse and ensuring their adherence to the President's priorities. No other agency has this unique responsibility to coordinate efforts across the federal government to execute one shared drug strategy. This oversight is instrumental in eliminating waste and fraud by preventing duplicative programs and strategies among the various federal agencies. Cutting ONDCP's budget would significantly harm the effectiveness of this unique mission.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, 70,237 Americans died of a drug overdose in 2017, a 10% increase from 2016. With 192 people dying from drug overdose each day, there is no doubt the drug epidemic is an urgent and serious problem impacting families across our nation. The President's budget proposal would create an unnecessary distraction at a time when the federal government should be focused on saving lives. We urge you to continue to allow the ONDCP to use its expertise to administer these programs with its full funding intact.

Sincerely,

Art Acevedo
President, Major Cities Chiefs Association
Chief of Police, Houston Police Department

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