



WESTERN STATES SHERIFFS ASSOCIATION

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April 3, 2020

United States Congress:

The Western States Sheriffs' Association, comprised of elected County Sheriffs from 17 Western states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming), is 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, the nation is in the midst of a significant drug problem which threatens the future of our youth and country as a whole. Illegal drugs, such as methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and other synthetic drugs, continue to be smuggled into our country, and it is imperative to have a national strategy to combat these drugs and the operations of the drug trafficking organizations. The sobering reality is that drug-induced deaths have surpassed motor vehicle deaths every year since 2009, with overdose deaths of more than 67,000 in 2018.

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. HIDTA is truly an agency-neutral program that serves only to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of Federal, state, tribal, and local law enforcement. The strength of the HIDTA program is found in its innovation, neutrality, flexibility, and diversity. Moving HIDTA out of ONDCP would drive a wedge between state and local law enforcement and the Department of Justice.

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 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 just 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, the budget and priorities would no longer be determined by the Executive Board, and the Director would not report to the Executive Board.

The HIDTA program was created by Congress with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 to provide assistance to Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies operating in areas determined to be critical drug-trafficking regions of the United States. There are currently 33 HIDTAs with HIDTA-designated counties located in all 50 states, as well as in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia.

In the Western states, there are 15 HIDTAs coordinating efforts in each of the 17 states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming). This area encompasses the entire Southwest Border region, the Pacific Coast, and a portion of the Canadian border.

To address the drug threat, the individual HIDTAs facilitate, support, and enhance collaborative drug control efforts among law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations with a common voice and unified strategy and thereby significantly reduce the impact of illegal trafficking and use of drugs throughout the region and the United States.

Nationally, the HIDTA program's return on investment (ROI) is \$158.56 for every dollar spent, demonstrating a positive impact on drug law enforcement efforts. In the Western United States, the positive impact of ONDCP and HIDTA is undeniable. HIDTA funds coordinate and support the efforts of participants and agencies in designated HIDTA counties. In 2019, HIDTA Initiatives across the nation:

- Dismantled/Disrupted 3,122 drug trafficking and money laundering organizations.
- Arrested 109,678 drug traffickers and violent offenders.
- Seized \$41.7 billion worth of illicit narcotics.
- Removed 25,761 firearms.
- Provided Demand Reduction training and developed and provided numerous prevention materials to law enforcement, health agencies, and prevention coalitions.

The HIDTA Investigative Support Centers (ISCs) provide analytical support to investigators, as well as strategic intelligence products, to further combat drug trafficking in the Western region and across the United States. Additionally, each HIDTA has a training component, providing current training to investigators and analysts, and participates in the Domestic Highway Enforcement Program (DHE), the National Emerging Threats, and National Marijuana Initiatives.

In addition, the HIDTAs provide our law enforcement agencies with nationwide connectivity with other HIDTAs, increasing the exchange of information and enhancing joint investigations.

On behalf of the Western States Sheriffs' Association, we ask for your continued support of ONDCP, HIDTA, and the Drug Free Communities (DFC) programs. In addition, we ask that you seek the reauthorization of ONDCP and have OMB maintain ONDCP at necessary staffing levels. 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. Thank you for your consideration

Respectfully,



Sheriff Fred Lamphere, President Western States Sheriffs Association