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June 7, 2025

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SACOP/RACOP Representative
Tom Kelly
(Retired)
Apache Junction Police
Department

RE: Urgent Concerns Regarding FY2026 Budget Changes to HIDTA and ONDCP Oversight

Dear Senator Kelly,

I am a senior law enforcement executive responsible for ensuring public safety in Arizona as well as the current board president of The Arizona Association of Chiefs of Police. I am writing on behalf of the executive board of the Arizona Association of Chiefs of Police to express my deep concern about a portion of the President's FY 2026 Budget proposal, specifically the proposal to move the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to the Department of Justice and to cut the program funding by 35%. I respectfully submit that this proposal will have the unintended consequence of weakening the President's vision to build a coordinated national public safety strategy.

The current structure of the 33 regional HIDTAs under ONDCP leadership is a proven model of collaborative policing that has saved lives, dismantled violent drug trafficking organizations, and built lasting partnerships among federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement. The unparalleled success of the HIDTA program is due to its regional autonomy, impartial executive board governance, and the independent oversight provided by ONDCP. HIDTA provides a unique platform for federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agency partnerships throughout the nation. The record of agency collaboration speaks for itself. In 2024, on a national level, the HIDTAs have removed over \$17.6 billion worth of drugs from our communities.

The Arizona HIDTA region includes 10 of the 15 counties in Arizona, providing over \$13.4 million in funding that supports 27 initiatives across the state which investigate and disrupt drug trafficking organizations, seize crime guns, provide investigative case support, and share critical intelligence. The majority of Arizona HIDTA's funding (over 92%) goes directly to our local and tribal partners. This funding is not just support – it is a force multiplier enabling local agencies to work with their federal counterparts on complex, multi-jurisdictional, and international threats. Arizona HIDTA supports the efforts of 800 full-time and 44 part-time participants from 90 federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. In 2024, the Arizona HIDTA enforcement task forces investigated 75 drug trafficking organizations and 19 money laundering organizations, the majority of which had direct ties to sources of supply in Mexico.



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Each HIDTA is led by an executive board that includes the key federal, state, and local law enforcement leaders in the region. This structure is especially important because it provides state and local leaders with an equal voice in designing and implementing the most effective public safety strategies to address the prevailing drug threats and related crimes of violence in their communities.

HIDTA invests in several key public safety partnerships, including disrupting and dismantling the drug trafficking and money laundering organizations and violent gangs; creating an intelligence sharing network for the timely and accurate sharing of information, in particular drug trafficking and gun violence intelligence, among law enforcement agencies across the country; apprehending America's most wanted fugitives across the world; providing tactical training for officers to help keep safe; as well as building public safety/public health partnerships to reduce drug overdoses and save lives.

ONDCP leads and coordinates the nation's drug policy so that it improves the health and lives of the American people. The retention of the multi-faceted HIDTA program under ONDCP is essential to achieve the President's key drug policy priorities and public safety vision for America.

Simply put, this is not the time to weaken the nation's most effective multi-agency framework for addressing the threats posed by cartel-driven drug trafficking. Law enforcement professionals across the country, especially in Arizona, urge Congress to preserve ONDCP's authority over HIDTA and fully fund the HIDTA program.

I respectfully request your leadership in advocating for a reversal of this specific section of the budget proposal. Your support will help ensure that federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies retain the tools, partnerships, and autonomy required to safeguard our communities.

Sincerely,

Kara Riley

Chief Kara Riley
President, AACOP