

ILLINOIS SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

"United in Justice Since 1928"

www.ilsheriff.org

Jim Kaitschuk
Executive Director

Sheriff Nicholas Petitgout
McDonough County, President

June 17, 2025

Dear Illinois Congressional Members,

On behalf of the Illinois Sheriffs' Association (ISA), we express our strong support for the Chicago High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) and its vital mission. The Chicago HIDTA has long been a critical partner to Illinois law enforcement, promoting effective, collaborative efforts to combat drug trafficking and reduce narcotics-related violence in our communities.

The Chicago HIDTA supports 22 initiatives, including 16 enforcement initiatives, which enhance intelligence sharing, interdiction efforts, and investigative support for all law enforcement agencies in the seven Chicago HIDTA counties. More than 90% of HIDTA's funding goes directly to state and local law enforcement, making it indispensable to operations. The Chicago HIDTA's Executive Board, which is comprised of the leaders of the federal, state, county, and local law enforcement agencies in the Chicago HIDTA region, quickly and efficiently directs resources and ensures that investigations are targeting the unique issues in the Chicago HIDTA area of responsibility.

We are deeply concerned by the proposed FY2026 budget recommendations which include a 35% reduction in funding and a structural shift from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs (OJP). The current ONDCP framework empowers local agencies to develop targeted responses to evolving threats that are specific to that region's HIDTA, flexibility that would be lost under a more centralized OJP model.

The proposed shift would have negative consequences across the country, including:

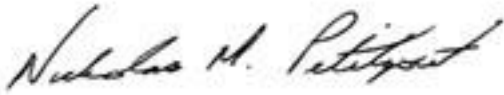
1. **Disruption of Interagency Coordination:** HIDTA's balanced partnership among federal, state, county, and local agencies could be disrupted by a more federally controlled model, risking mission drift and operational inefficiency.
2. **Operational Instability:** HIDTA-funded task forces conduct complex, long-term investigations. The proposed restructuring could delay funding, hinder continuity, and result in operational delays that would jeopardize ongoing investigations.
3. **Weakening of Public Health Integration:** Programs like the Overdose Response Strategy (ORS) which connect law enforcement with public health professionals who rely on HIDTA's unique structure to function effectively, something unlikely to be sustained within OJP's framework
4. **Lack of Justification for Change:** The HIDTA program enjoys strong bipartisan support, clean audits and demonstrable success. There is no clear problem the proposed change seeks to resolve, only unnecessary risk

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5. **A Reduction of the HIDTA Budget Would Negatively Impact Public Safety:** A 35% reduction of the HIDTA program budget would significantly impair our ability to support investigations, share intelligence, and carry out joint operations that keep our neighborhoods safe. Police departments and sheriff's offices across the region rely on HIDTA for its infrastructure, partnerships, and proven track record of success in reducing the impact of drug trafficking and drug-related violence in our communities.

We respectfully urge decision-makers to carefully consider the consequences of these proposed changes. The HIDTA program's value lies in its ability to unify federal, state, county, and local agencies under a neutral and collaborative model. Maintaining the current structure and funding is essential to sustaining public safety across Illinois.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nicholas M. Petitgout". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Nicholas" and last name "Petitgout" clearly legible.

Nicholas Petitgout, McDonough County Sheriff

ISA President