



Steve Soyka
Sheriff
Stearns County Sheriff's Office
807 Courthouse Square
St. Cloud, MN 56303
Steven.Soyka@stearnscountymn.gov | 320-259-3702

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The Honorable Tom Emmer
326 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Representative Emmer,

I am a senior law enforcement executive responsible for ensuring public safety in Stearns County, Minnesota. I am writing to express my deep concern about 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.

- The North Central HIDTA is steadfast in its commitment to keeping our communities safe from the threat posed by illicit drugs. North Central HIDTA is comprised of nine Minnesota counties and eight Wisconsin counties. In 2024 alone, North Central HIDTA seized more than \$67.8 million drugs, seized 1,560 crime guns, and made 4,759 arrests. There were 80 Drug Trafficking Organizations that were dismantled or disrupted.
 - Approximately 1700 Kilograms of Methamphetamine seized
 - Approximately 2.2 million fentanyl pills seized
 - Approximately 473 kilograms of cocaine seized
 - Over 150 state, local, tribal, and federal partner agencies
- The North Central HIDTA achieves a return on investment (ROI) of \$10.36, meaning that for every dollar invested, it generates \$10.36 in value.

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.

- The HIDTA Program is best administered by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), given its unbiased and neutral position towards any one department or agency. This structure guarantees neutrality and multi-agency partnerships - not just the directives of one specific agency.
- The neutrality of the HIDTA program is a key to its success. HIDTA is not an agency, it does not espouse the views of any one agency, and is not beholden to the mandates

of any one agency. HIDTA is truly an agency neutral program that serves only to facilitate and coordinate.

- The Office of National Drug Control Policy has the important responsibility to establish priorities and objectives for the nation's drug policy, which includes treatment, prevention and law enforcement. The goals include reducing illicit drug use, trafficking, drug-related crime and violence, and drug-related health consequences.
- The HIDTA Program is an essential component of the National Drug Control Strategy. It is clear that federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement plays an integral role in the balanced strategy to reducing drug use and its consequences.
- The strength of the HIDTA program is truly multi-dimensional. One of the cornerstones of the program is its demonstrated ability to bring people and agencies together to work towards a common goal.
- The HIDTA Program, differs from single mission agencies, employs a comprehensive multi-disciplinary, holistic strategy to address the prevailing public health and public safety issues raised by drug abuse and misuse in our society. The HIDTA Overdose Response Strategy is a perfect example of this ability to adapt and improvise, based on the evolving threat.
- While the primary mission focus of enforcement remains of paramount importance, HIDTAs throughout the nation are also involved in drug prevention educational activities that stress training, partnerships, sponsorship and community outreach.
- HIDTA enhances law enforcement intelligence sharing among Federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. HIDTA also provides the important service of deconfliction of investigational targets and locations to prevent "blue on blue" situations and promote officer safety.
- Intelligence and information sharing is a critical component of the overall strategy to reduce the market for illegal drugs. The HIDTA program mandates and establishes Investigative Support Centers in designated areas, specifically to provide analytical services and create and maintain a communication infrastructure that can facilitate information sharing among federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies.
- The HIDTA program has been at the forefront of establishing, coordinating, and supporting innovative approaches in partnership with relevant disciplines to stem the tide of drug abuse. The emerging partnership between public health and public safety have never been more important as the nation confronts the opioid crisis, and the HIDTA Program provides the perfect platform to promote that partnership.

- The HIDTA Program is unique in its capability to promote the synergistic effect of enforcement, prevention, and education, working together across disciplines toward achieving a sustainable quality of life in our communities which allows our citizens to remain healthy and achieve their full potential.
- ONDCP and the HIDTA program have developed a partnership that has been instrumental in the continuing success of the HIDTA Program. It is a partnership that has consistently paved the way for greater achievement in addressing the significant challenges of drug use and abuse throughout the Nation.

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

I respectfully request your leadership in advocating for a reversal of this 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,

Steve Soyka
Sheriff
Stearns County Sheriff's Office