



South Carolina

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The Honorable Russell Fry
U.S. House of Representatives
1500 Highway 17 N, Suite 304
Surfside Beach, SC 29575

Dear Representative Fry,

On behalf of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED), I urge your continued support of legislation to reauthorize the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Program.

As our nation continues to grapple with a devastating drug overdose crisis, ONDCP's leadership is more critical than ever. Both national and state data reflect a decreasing trend of Opioid Overdose Deaths. National and state data from 2019 through 2022 reflect an alarming increase in drug overdose fatalities. In 2022, South Carolina alone experienced 2,296 overdose fatalities, a 6% increase from the previous year. However, in 2023, there were 2,203 overdose fatalities, a decrease of 6.23%. While South Carolina Department of Public Health has yet to release data from 2024, the Centers for Disease Control provisional data indicates a continued projected decrease of 29% in South Carolina and 23.5% nationally. I believe this data reflects positive progress combating this crisis and the HIDTA Program, in part, is responsible for this downward trend. This is an encouraging sign that sustained, coordinated efforts are making a real difference in the fight against the overdose crisis. HIDTA is a key component of our state and national drug control strategy and plays an essential role in coordinating efforts at all levels of law enforcement, i.e. federal, state, local, and tribal, in combating the growing threats posed by drug trafficking and its consequences. Their collaborative approach is critical in combating drug trafficking and mitigating its tragic consequences.

The HIDTA Program's success is evident nationwide. In 2023, HIDTA task forces seized \$17.3 billion in drugs and over 40,000 crime firearms, provided analytical support for more than 31,700 investigations, and delivered a return on investment of \$63.47 for every dollar spent. In 2024, South Carolina HIDTA supported task forces seized a total of 646.78 pounds of drugs, including 14.65 pounds of Fentanyl, 255.89 pounds of Cocaine, 177.27 pounds of Methamphetamine and Methamphetamine/Ice, 133.73 pounds of Marijuana, and 65.19 pounds of Other Drugs, i.e., Opiates, THC Resin, Xylazine, and Alprazolam. Likewise, South Carolina HIDTA supported task forces also seized 128,662 drug units (pills), including 126,072 Fentanyl, 33 Methamphetamine and 2,557 MDMA pills. The South Carolina HIDTA supported task forces also seized \$2,031,344 in cash, 50 firearms, and \$540,498 in jewelry and cars.



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In 2024, the HIDTA Program played a crucial role in bolstering numerous successful operations in South Carolina, notably supporting the Tactical Diversion Squad (TDS). TDS's efforts led to 41 arrests, the seizure of \$264,447.46 in arrest-related assets, 11 wire intercepts, and the confiscation of 4 firearms. Additionally, TDS seized a total of 227.19 pounds of drugs, including 116.40 pounds of cocaine, 50.27 pounds of oxycodone, 59.50 pounds of crystal meth, and 1.02 pounds of cocaine base. Four SLED agents were assigned to this task force and received \$41,566.10 in overtime reimbursement from HIDTA. These achievements underscore the critical importance of HIDTA's funding and continued support, especially when considering the limited budgets of state and local agencies.

The program's structure, which provides balanced oversight with equal representation from federal, state, and local criminal justice leaders, ensures responsiveness to regional threats and facilitates essential intelligence sharing among more than 20,000 law enforcement personnel nationwide. The Atlanta-Carolinas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (AC-HIDTA) encompasses regions in South Carolina as well as Georgia and North Carolina. Within this area, over 100 federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies collaborate to combat drug trafficking and related issues. In South Carolina specifically, the AC-HIDTA includes four regional locations, Columbia, Charleston, Florence and Greenville. The collaboration has proven invaluable in addressing emerging drug trafficking challenges and associated violence. Any reductions or removal of the HIDTA Program from ONDCP would undermine its effectiveness and jeopardize the longstanding partnerships that enable comprehensive drug control strategies. The neutral oversight provided by ONDCP ensures all stakeholders have an equal voice, maintaining the program's responsiveness and efficacy.

I respectfully urge you to support the reauthorization and robust funding of ONDCP and the HIDTA Program. I strongly oppose any efforts to remove the HIDTA Program from ONDCP, as such a move would severely hinder the program's ability to facilitate the critical collaboration needed to combat the ongoing drug crisis.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. Your support is essential in ensuring that the HIDTA Program and ONDCP remain fully equipped to protect the health and safety of our South Carolina communities.

Sincerely,

Mark Keel, Chief
South Carolina Law Enforcement Division