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STEVEN R. FINNEY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY GENERAL
FIRST JUDICIAL DISTRICT

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June 6, 2025

The Honorable Diana Harshbarger
205 Revere Street
Kingsport, TN 37660

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

Dear Congresswoman, Harshbarger,

My name is Steve Finney, the elected District Attorney General for the First Judicial District. I am the senior law enforcement executive responsible for ensuring public safety in the First Judicial District, comprising of Carter, Johnson, Unicoi, and Washington counties. 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 supports the thirteen local and state law enforcement agencies within the First Judicial District. One of my assigned criminal investigators also dedicates his time to serving as the Director of the First Judicial Drug Task Force and serves on the TBI Drug Task Force.

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.

Law enforcement professionals across the country, especially in the high traffic counties like the ones within the First Judicial District are addressing the threats posed by cartel-driven drug trafficking. My office strongly urges 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 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,



Steven R. Finney
District Attorney General
First Judicial District