

**Subject: Urgent Concerns Regarding FY 2026 Budget Reductions and Oversight Changes Affecting HIDTA Programs**

I am writing to express my strongest support for the South Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program and to voice urgent concern regarding proposed changes outlined in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget. The suggested 35% reduction in HIDTA funding, alongside the proposed transfer of HIDTA oversight from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs (OJP), poses a serious threat to one of the most effective and collaborative public safety–public health partnerships in the state of Texas. These changes risk undermining the very framework that has made HIDTA a cornerstone of coordinated substance use disorder prevention and education in Texas and beyond.

South Texas HIDTA has served as a vital and longstanding partner to Texas A&M University Health Science Center (TAMU HSC) and the Texas A&M Opioid Task Force. Through this partnership, HIDTA has made measurable and enduring contributions to the development, implementation, and dissemination of evidence-informed prevention, education, and early intervention strategies aimed at mitigating the impact of substance use and opioid-related harms across the state. Unlike traditional enforcement programs, HIDTA's approach under ONDCP oversight is unique in that it serves as a true intersection between public health and public safety, enabling responsive, non-punitive, community-driven solutions to some of our state's most urgent behavioral health challenges. South Texas HIDTA has played a central role in supporting Texas school districts in their efforts to comply with Texas Education Code §38.351, as mandated by Senate Bill 629 and House Bill 3908. These statutes require public schools to develop opioid response policies and ensure that staff receive training in the use of opioid antagonists. Through joint planning and logistical coordination, HIDTA partnered with TAMU HSC to develop training toolkits, conduct administrator briefings, and provide direct technical assistance to more than 250 school districts statewide. Their contributions ensured that school administrators, nurses, and counselors not only met compliance requirements but also had access to high-quality, credible overdose response education tailored to their regional and cultural contexts.

HIDTA has also been instrumental in the delivery of the Opioid Education and Naloxone Administration (OENA) training program, a partnership that has resulted in the statewide education of more than 7,500 law enforcement personnel, educators, and community members in overdose prevention and response. South Texas HIDTA facilitated OENA expansion into tribal law enforcement agencies, supported bilingual training content for Spanish-speaking communities, and co-hosted regional train-the-trainer events to extend program reach. Their law enforcement legitimacy and deep community ties brought essential credibility to OENA initiatives, especially in rural and underserved communities where trust and consistency are critical.

Equally important has been HIDTA's involvement in the Texas Opioid Prevention for Students (TOPS) initiative, led by the Texas A&M Opioid Task Force. South Texas HIDTA provided key support in identifying implementation zones, facilitating school and community partner relationships, and aligning program goals with the unique public health and safety needs of the region. Their staff participated in youth-centered focus groups and helped refine curriculum and outreach strategies to ensure the program was culturally competent and geographically responsive, particularly in RHP Regions 6 and 20. HIDTA's collaboration with public schools, athletic leagues, and youth development programs directly advanced the TOPS mission to educate students and caregivers about opioid risks and to promote protective decision-making strategies.

HIDTA has also been a critical force in the development and dissemination of the Think Smart curriculum, a culturally responsive prevention program delivered in extracurricular settings such as after-school programs, faith-based youth groups, and juvenile justice environments. In coordination with HIDTA's prevention staff, Think Smart was piloted in counties including Bexar, Webb, and Maverick—areas of heightened concern due to high rates of adolescent drug exposure and behavioral health disparities. HIDTA's outreach efforts allowed the program to rapidly scale across regional networks, and their partnerships with school superintendents, coaches, and local law enforcement ensured broad-based adoption and sustainability.

Beyond these major initiatives, South Texas HIDTA has played a pivotal role in the dissemination of credible, science-based substance use disorder education materials throughout the South Texas region. The organization's prevention coordinators have worked closely with TAMU HSC and local stakeholders to host town halls, train educators, and distribute tens of thousands of resources, including bilingual opioid risk education, harm reduction materials, and social-emotional learning modules for youth. These activities are not ancillary to HIDTA's mission—they are foundational, and they reflect the organization's exceptional ability to operate flexibly and collaboratively at the nexus of enforcement and prevention.

It is precisely this agility that is at risk under the proposed transfer to the Office of Justice Programs. A transition to OJP oversight would severely limit HIDTA's ability to function as a neutral convener across public health and law enforcement sectors. The current ONDCP framework allows HIDTA to adapt to local needs, maintain trust with community stakeholders, and support preventive efforts outside the scope of traditional criminal justice programming. Without this neutrality and structural flexibility, HIDTA's role in upstream prevention and education may be diminished or lost entirely. Moreover, a 35% reduction in HIDTA funding would decimate critical infrastructure that supports statewide overdose prevention and youth behavioral health initiatives. It would reduce access to high-need, high-risk communities along the Texas-Mexico border, undermine progress in statewide school district compliance with opioid education mandates, and endanger the continuity of successful programs such as TOPS, Think Smart, and OENA. This level of budgetary contraction, coupled with realignment to a more enforcement-centric federal agency, is likely to cause irreparable harm to prevention systems that took years to build.

Therefore, I respectfully urge federal decision-makers to preserve HIDTA's existing alignment under ONDCP and to reject the proposed funding reduction. South Texas HIDTA has proven to be not only a reliable enforcement partner, but also a transformative leader in prevention, education, and community capacity-building. Their role as a convener, trainer, and credible voice in the substance use prevention ecosystem cannot be replicated under a centralized justice model. The preservation of their autonomy, funding, and current operational framework is critical to safeguarding public health and public safety across Texas and beyond.

Sincerely,

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