



Austin County Sheriff's Office

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Jack W. Brandes, Sheriff - Matthew Walls, Chief Deputy
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June 12, 2025

The Honorable Ted Cruz
167 Russell
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Senator Cruz,

As a senior law enforcement executive responsible for public safety and drug interdiction efforts in the state of Texas, I write to express deep concern over the proposed budgetary changes in the President's FY2026 proposal—specifically the moving of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to the Department of Justice and the proposed 35% cut to HIDTA funding.

This proposal, while perhaps well-intentioned, threatens to disrupt a proven model of collaborative policing that has saved lives, dismantled violent drug trafficking organizations, and built lasting partnerships between federal, state, and local law enforcement. By centralizing HIDTA management within the Department of Justice, the administration risks politicizing a program that has thrived precisely because of its regional autonomy and impartial executive board governance.

For over three decades, HIDTA has delivered unmatched flexibility in targeting regional drug threats—including fentanyl—by empowering 33 regional executive boards comprised of seasoned law enforcement leaders from federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement. These boards rapidly adapt strategies, fund critical investigative, interdiction, and intelligence initiatives focused on regional drug threats. Under ONDCP's independent oversight, HIDTA funding has remained insulated from partisan shifts and inter-agency conflicts. Transferring this oversight to DOJ will almost certainly erode that neutrality and effectiveness.

The track record of the HIDTA program speaks for itself — The HIDTA program supports a total of 23,037 state, local, tribal, and federal law enforcement officers, analysts, and support personnel that are directly assigned to one of the 1,032 HIDTA Task Forces around the country. There are 2,827 separate law enforcement agencies participating in the HIDTA program. Additionally, HIDTAs maintain 63 drug Intelligence Support Centers strategically located in major U.S.

cities and along our nation's Southern and Northern borders. Through this participation, in 2024, the HIDTA program disrupted and/or dismantled 3,209 drug trafficking and money laundering organizations, apprehended 35,864 fugitives, and removed 40,216 crime guns from the streets of America. During 2024 the HIDTA also seized \$672.7 million worth of currency and other assets along with **\$17.6 billion** worth of illegal drugs, including **7,302 kilograms of**

fentanyl with an additional 113,526,123 dosage units of fentanyl, 167,263 kilograms of cocaine, 121,311 kilograms of methamphetamine, and 1,403 kilograms of heroin. In addition to the direct enforcement activities in 2024, HIDTA provided training to 104,698 officers, analysts, and support personnel.

The effects of this shift will be felt immediately and acutely in our county and throughout the state. Already contending with record-level fentanyl fatalities and the complex criminal networks that traffic synthetic opioids and other illicit drugs, our local agencies rely on HIDTA funding to support multi-jurisdictional task forces, equipment modernization, interagency communication systems, and real-time information/intelligence sharing. Weakening or delaying these resources through bureaucratic restructuring is not just inefficient—it's dangerous.

Moreover, the change contradicts the foundational principle that successful drug enforcement must be collaborative, not dictated by a single federal entity. HIDTA's structure fosters genuine joint ownership, with local and tribal law enforcement agencies treated as equal partners alongside federal counterparts. Centralizing control in DOJ will erode this balance and likely reduce the allocation and flexibility of funds that are essential for local initiatives.

Simply put, this is not the time to weaken the nation's most effective multi-agency framework for fighting fentanyl and cartel-driven drug trafficking. Law enforcement professionals across the country—and especially in high-risk counties like ours—urge Congress to preserve ONDCP's authority over HIDTA and reject this transfer of control.

I respectfully request your leadership in advocating for a reversal of this budget proposal. Your support will help ensure that local agencies retain the tools, partnerships, and autonomy required to safeguard our communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Brandes", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jack W. Brandes
Austin County Sheriff
jackb@austincountyso.org