



From: Jacquelyn Aluotto President, No Trafficking Zone (NTZ)

Date: June 11, 2025

Subject: Urgent Concerns Regarding FY 2026 Budget Cuts and Oversight Transfer Threatening the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) Program and National Trafficking Investigations

The proposed Fiscal Year 2026 federal budget includes a 35% reduction to the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program and proposes transferring oversight from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs (OJP). These changes pose a significant risk to national security and anti-trafficking infrastructure, which is currently supporting one of the most critical, multi-state investigations in the country **involving transnational organized crime, human trafficking, narcotics trafficking, arms trafficking, and financial laundering.**

A few years ago, at the center of this concern, a major federal investigation was launched after No Trafficking Zone (NTZ) brought forward critical survivor-led intelligence to trusted partners within HIDTA. This effort catalyzed a multi-agency investigation that now spans five states and continues to expose a deeply embedded and violent criminal network involving not only drug cartels but also **homegrown gangs, drug dealers, pimps, and predators.** These entities operate in concert to traffic people, narcotics, and firearms while laundering their profits through legitimate businesses embedded in local economies.

This intersection of criminal enterprises has systematically infiltrated public schools and youth-serving systems, targeting the most vulnerable, **high school students and at-risk youth, both domestically and internationally.** The **nexus between criminal organizations and their victims is tightly interwoven,** revealing a coordinated effort to exploit children through trafficking, narcotics, and coercive control across borders and institutions.

Survivors revealed that **drug dealers have also exchanged sex acts involving women and youth as another form of currency in exchange for paying for narcotics,** further embedding exploitation into the drug economy and trafficking underworld. Human beings are sometimes used as payment, merchandise, and leverage, treated as disposable commodities in a violent and unchecked economy.

These women and children are groomed, lured, and recruited into overlapping systems of human and drug trafficking. They are coerced and forced into transporting narcotics and taking criminal charges on behalf of their abusers, and ultimately left unprotected by the very systems meant to ensure their safety. The illicit profits generated are cleaned through a sophisticated network of businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions, disguising income derived from the sale of drugs, people, sex, and weapons.

HIDTA's role in this investigation has been irreplaceable. By leveraging tactical intelligence, confidential informants, and real-time inter-agency collaboration, HIDTA has been apart of local

cases assisting when survivors are recovered, the arrest of perpetrators, and the development of federal cases that pursue **comprehensive prosecution across human trafficking, narcotics, arms, and financial crimes**. This case has become a template for how integrated law enforcement and advocacy partnerships can dismantle not just isolated perpetrators but also the entire operating model of criminal enterprises. It also represents a breakthrough in understanding how youth are being targeted, manipulated, and trapped in cycles of exploitation, insights that are essential to informing school safety, prevention policy, and early intervention strategies across the country.

The proposed 35% funding cut would significantly impair HIDTA's operational capacity at a time when fentanyl overdoses, gang and cartel recruitment in schools, and coordinated human trafficking networks are rapidly expanding. Moreover, shifting HIDTA oversight from ONDCP to DOJ/OJP risks disrupting the very agility, independence, and trust-based cooperation that makes this model so effective. Investigations involving criminal organizations, school infiltration, arms movement, and laundering operations require real-time collaboration, something the current HIDTA structure under ONDCP uniquely supports.

We strongly urge federal leadership to **maintain full FY 2026 funding for HIDTA and preserve its oversight under ONDCP**. HIDTA remains one of the few federal infrastructures capable of sustaining investigations that involve overlapping crimes, multiple jurisdictions, and the protection of highly vulnerable populations. Any restructuring or defunding of this program will significantly limit the government's ability to identify, intercept, and dismantle criminal enterprises of this magnitude.

This investigation has revealed a disturbing reality: **cartels, domestic gangs, pimps, drug dealers, and predators are targeting children, embedding themselves in schools, online, and in communities, and fueling an underground economy that profits from human suffering**. Women and children are traded, coerced, and sold as commodities, used to settle debts, fuel drug demand, and generate income. HIDTA has been a central pillar in exposing and confronting this reality. Through its support, we now have a blueprint for stopping these cycles of exploitation, by dismantling the systems that enable them.

Now, is not the time to diminish HIDTA's capacity. Now is the time to recognize it as a national model for 21st-century human and drug trafficking prevention, survivor protection, and multi-jurisdictional justice. Lives depend on it.

Sincerely,

Jacquelyn Aluotto

Jacquelyn Aluotto

President, No Trafficking Zone (NTZ)

Contact Information:

jacquelyn@notraffickingzone.org

