



NATIONAL NARCOTIC OFFICERS' ASSOCIATIONS' COALITION

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Statement for the Record

United States Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control

Oversight of the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy

Bob Bushman, President

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Chairman Whitehouse, Chairman Grassley, and Members of the Caucus:

The National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition (NNOAC) is pleased to submit this statement for the record regarding for the Caucus's hearing on the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy.

The NNOAC is comprised of 40 individual state narcotic associations that represent more than 55,000 law enforcement officers from across the nation. Our members are the brave men and women who are on the front lines of narcotic enforcement efforts in every community.

We are in the middle of the worst drug epidemic in our nation's history. Tragically, there were more than 107,000 drug poisoning deaths in 2021 alone. As the death rate due to drug use continues to climb, our members are still working to protect our communities from the tragic consequences of this epidemic. Our experiences and insights are vital to the development of sound policy that can reduce the number of drug overdose deaths and stop the drug trafficking organizations that seek to profit off the pain and harm that our society endures.

From our perspective, the national drug control strategy is failing. The dramatic increase in drug-related deaths is clear evidence of that. There are a few key reasons in our view. Changes to state and federal laws and policies have made it easier for drug traffickers and violent criminals to avoid arrest and prosecution. While treatment and recovery programs have received increased investment over the past several years, funding and fully supporting effective law enforcement activities targeted at the trafficking and distribution organizations that are responsible for killing so many Americans have not.

A strengthened focus on drug enforcement programs is needed now more than ever. Recent results of the drug control strategy clearly indicate that we must change course with policy and pass laws that hold drug traffickers and dealers accountable. We must enable law enforcement to effectively interdict trafficking, and we must ensure that prosecutors do their jobs and prosecute drug trafficking and distribution crimes. The National Drug Control Strategy must more boldly acknowledge the vital role of drug law enforcement – including federal support for state and local

drug enforcement – as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce the carnage that is occurring today in every American community.

As long as the federal government fails to effectively control our borders and international actors exploit that weakness to funnel narcotics into our country, and as long as trafficking organizations ply their trade across state lines, the federal government has an affirmative responsibility to support state and local drug enforcement efforts.

Effective drug control strategies should champion programs and resources that are vital to and support multi-jurisdictional law enforcement efforts like the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program (Byrne JAG), the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program (HIDTA), and the Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS).

Byrne JAG funding has been effective historically in fostering the development of multi-jurisdictional drug task forces, which have spawned best practices in information sharing, case deconfliction and institutional coordination against local and regional drug threats. The result of those investments in the past was a massive leveraging of state and local funding focused on reducing the threat posed by drug traffickers. But in recent years a smaller percentage of Byrne JAG funding has been allocated by states to support task forces. Turning around that trend would be an important step.

HIDTAs are addressing regional drug problems based upon a unique threat assessment process and fund multi-agency task forces that are investigating and dismantling drug labs, trafficking operations and money laundering activity. HIDTAs have demonstrated success at initiating and promoting innovative methods in enforcement and information sharing, resulting in intelligence sharing on an unprecedented scale related to drug trafficking threats. Congress has provided small increases in HIDTA funding over the past few years and the NNOAC appreciates that support. Yet, significantly more resources for HIDTA are needed to begin to match the threat.

The RISS program is helping nearly 10,000 law enforcement agencies around the country, especially small ones, with analytical and investigative support functions. These programs give agencies the resources they otherwise would not have access to for going after sophisticated and dangerous criminal operations, helping to take deadly drugs off the street and save lives. Congress has provided steady funding for RISS, but substantial additional funding is needed to enable appropriate levels of support to law enforcement given the increased threat.

We need to ensure that each of these law enforcement-related efforts are supported and funded properly, not ignored and weakened.

Our members are alarmed about state and federal policies that seek to decriminalize, legalize, or normalize drug use. While a comprehensive strategy must address treatment, it is wrong for government policy to encourage drug use. These policies are often disguised as harm reduction. Instead, an effective drug control strategy should warn users about the effects of drug use and protect victims at all costs. Decriminalizing and legalizing drugs validates the false belief that because some drugs are legal that they are safe.

All available evidence demonstrates that marijuana use is simply not good for public safety or public health, and efforts to make marijuana more available to the public is leading to higher addiction rates, increases in workplace accidents and violence, and more calls for public safety services. Marijuana is the most prevalent illegal drug detected in testing following traffic crashes. The increasing costs of emergency medical care, addiction treatment, public health programs and insurance premiums are putting heavy financial burdens on our citizens and their state and local governments. Worst of all, the number of youths using marijuana has increased in recent years.

In addition, a comprehensive drug control strategy must immediately address the alarming number of illicit drugs like fentanyl that are smuggled and shipped across our borders. Fentanyl is a dangerous and fatal synthetic drug responsible for many of the overdose deaths that our country is experiencing. The proliferation of fentanyl is the direct

result of foreign supply making its way into the United States. The ease with which drugs transported by cartels and trafficking organizations pass through our porous borders is inexcusable. The Federal government must do more to prevent drugs and criminals from entering our county. We need effective immigration laws and border control strategies that will prevent entry to drug traffickers, their criminal associates, and their drug supplies.

As narcotic officers we cannot – and will never – accept the high costs of drug abuse, addiction, and drug-related crime as the norm. We have knocked on too many doors to break the devastating news that a loved one died of an overdose or was killed in a drugged driving accident or drug-related violence. We have rescued too many infants and children from toxic meth labs and abuse-ridden crack houses. We have saved countless lives by administering overdose reversal medications. We have seen too many promising young lives destroyed by the disease of addiction. We have watched too many of our brothers and sisters die in the line of duty at the hands of drug traffickers.

Members of the NNOAC know that every one of these costs is avoidable. While we desperately seek improvements to our nation’s drug laws and policies, we will continue to go to work every day taking huge risks to make things better for our communities and our country.

The NNOAC will continue to collaborate with all parties to improve the National Drug Control Strategy. As you consider our nation’s response to the drug epidemic and related drug-related crime, we ask that you champion the importance of drug law enforcement in protecting our communities. Thank you for considering our perspective.