



**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**

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**Chairman Whitehouse, Co-Chairman Grassley, and Members of the Caucus:**

The National High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Directors' Association (NHDA) is pleased to submit this statement for the record regarding the Caucus's hearing on the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) and the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy.

This hearing is very timely and relevant to the 33 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas represented in all 50 states, along with the 23,286 federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies that participate in HIDTA task forces across the country. The HIDTA Program was created by Congress in 1991, and is a grant Program designed and funded under ONDCP. The HIDTA Program provides funding and other tools to enhance the ability of federal, state local and tribal communities to focus on shared goals and solutions to address the Nation's deadly drug crisis.

The HIDTA Program supports coordinated law enforcement strategies in targeting the cartels that are causing irreparable damage to the communities of our country. Coordinated multiagency, multi-jurisdictional law enforcement strategies generate an exponential increase in investigative capability, maximizing the use of available resources to prosecute members of these drug organizations, while reducing the supply of illegal drugs in designated areas across the United States. HIDTA does not fund law enforcement agencies, but rather invests in strategies developed equally in federal, state, local and tribal partnerships. The strength of the HIDTA Program is found in its innovation, expanded scope of mission and diversity. It cannot be emphasized enough that the cornerstone of the Program is in its demonstrated ability to bring people and agencies together to work towards the common goal of dismantling drug cartels.

As you know, in recent years, overdose deaths have grown exponentially across the country, mainly due to the misuse of synthetic opioids like fentanyl. Over 75% of the 107,000 drug overdose deaths reported in 2021 involved an opioid. Further, our country is on track for another 120,000 overdose deaths in 2022. Although the HIDTAs across the country have a primary mission focusing on drug law enforcement, we also recognize that the severity of our nation's drug crisis calls for us to develop unprecedented responses to forming and nurturing partnerships with treatment and prevention professionals to provide a combined, and unified response for preventing drug misuse and treating addiction. The HIDTA program has deployed innovative strategies to create the best relationship between law enforcement and treatment and prevention partners.

From our perspective, the 2022 National Drug Control Strategy does not appear at face value to prioritize drug law enforcement, but leans heavily towards treatment and prevention. The National Drug Control Strategy must more boldly declare the role of drug law enforcement in this strategy. However, we are happy to report to this Caucus that the partnership between ONDCP and the HIDTA Program has remained strong and resilient for many years. The current leadership, under ONDCP Director Rahul Gupta has only solidified our strong and growing partnership. The leadership amongst the HIDTA program has been pleasantly surprised at the priority for drug law enforcement demonstrated under Dr. Gupta's leadership at ONDCP.

NHDA would like to thank the members of this Caucus for recognizing the importance of keeping the HIDTA Program under ONDCP. The Executive Boards from the 33 HIDTAs across the country are comprised of an equal number of federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement agency executives, all with an equal voice in developing a regional strategy based on the drug threats in their regions, which includes the concurrent threats of drug related violence, human trafficking and terrorism. The neutrality of the HIDTA Program under ONDCP, as opposed to operating under the control of a federal agency, is the primary reason why the HIDTA Program has been so successful and inclusive.

NHDA would also like to let this Caucus know that a strong and fully staffed ONDCP would be of great benefit to the HIDTA National Program. Due to recent budget cuts, ONDCP is currently operating at a 65% personnel capacity. Also of concern is that ONDCP needs to be re-authorized, as its current Authorization expires in 2023. In this dire climate, with over 100,000 overdose deaths a year across America, HIDTA needs ONDCP "firing on all eight cylinders" in order to confront this significant and deadly threat to our population.

Anything that the members of this Caucus can do to strengthen this nation's focus on drug law enforcement efforts across the country will clearly send a message to the Cartels that they can no longer continue their business-as-usual practices. Of serious concern to the HIDTA task forces across the country is the alarming uptick in fentanyl seizures everywhere in the country. This is directly attributed to the new focus and U.S demand for synthetic fentanyl production. The Cartels have realized the incredible profit margins and steady availability for fentanyl production for a drug that is not subject to weather, eradication efforts or geographical restrictions. The Cartels have also realized that synthetic opioids are so powerfully addictive and that it takes so little of the substance to create a strong, potent and profitable product with a high addiction rate. U.S. law enforcement is experiencing unprecedented seizure rates of fentanyl powder and fake pills containing fentanyl in the U.S. that are increasing every year since 2018. This is especially alarming considering the increases in overdoses and overdose deaths due to fentanyl being experienced by emergency rooms across the country. U.S. law enforcement is also observing trends of fentanyl mixed with methamphetamine and cocaine as well. Seizures of Methamphetamine and cocaine are also at all-time highs by U.S. law enforcement. A renewed message for drug law enforcement by this Caucus would be greatly appreciated, especially in light of proposed and enacted policies that decriminalize, legalize, or normalize drug use.

Each HIDTA, and the HIDTA Program as a whole, is ready to offer assistance Members of this Caucus to develop new, innovative strategies; and improve upon existing strategies to address the challenges that lie before us. Once again, thank you for your leadership and support of the HIDTA Program.

Sincerely,

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