

**Statement for the Record**  
**Rep. Gerald E. Connolly**  
**“Oversight and Reauthorization of**  
**the Office of National Drug Control Policy”**  
**July 27, 2023**

Data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), show our country’s drug deaths are at an all-time high. From 2022 to 2023, drug overdoses killed more than 107,000 people.<sup>1</sup> That is almost 300 people a day and an increase of more than 36,000 deaths since the opioid crisis was first deemed a national emergency almost exactly six years ago. This epidemic doesn’t care where you live, or what political party you belong to. The crisis has touched every corner of this country, and Northern Virginia is no exception. In 2022, Fairfax County reported more than 300 nonfatal opioid overdoses and 45 fatal opioid overdoses during just the first 6 months of the year.<sup>2</sup> Every day, people across the country die from drug addiction. Families are torn apart. Americans are suffering. As Members of Congress, we must do our jobs to effectively address it.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle continue to blame vulnerable migrants fleeing violence, hunger, and natural disasters for illicit drug smuggling, but facts are stubborn things. Over 90 percent of fentanyl, and over 80 percent of total illegal narcotics, arrive at legal points of entry—not between them—and are smuggled largely by Americans—not unauthorized migrants. And last December, CBP seized 4,500 pounds of fentanyl, the largest amount ever recorded.<sup>3</sup> Incredibly, just five of those 4,500 pounds were seized at the border by U.S. Border Patrol. Republicans are focused on 1% of the problem, 100% of the time.

Furthermore, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) *is* focused on disrupting illicit drug trafficking networks. It plays a unique and central role as a coordinating and evaluating entity, which allows our law enforcement agencies to be more effective in combatting cartels and drug dealers. However, as we conduct oversight and discuss reauthorization of the ONDCP, we should remember that the *principal* goal of this Office, by statute, is to combat the misuse of drugs in this country by addressing both supply reduction and demand reduction. It is not to defend our southern border.<sup>4</sup>

Just last year, the Biden-Harris Administration awarded \$1.5 billion to all states and territories to beat back the opioid crisis, support people in recovery, and provide more funding law enforcement officials on the front lines of the overdose epidemic. This year, the White House called for a historic investment of \$46.1 billion for National Drug Control Program agencies in their FY 2024 budget request to Congress. We need to support these efforts, not defund them.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/news/opioids-learn-how-get-help-and-prevent-overdoses#:~:text=In%20all%20of%202022%2C%20there,help%20individuals%20who%20need%20assistance.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://twitter.com/NickMiroff/status/1620874604335210496>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/21/1702#:~:text=facilitate%20broad%2Dscale%20information%20sharing,the%20national%20drug%20control%20efforts;>

[https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/uscode.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def\\_id=21-USC-785215267-1862302916&term\\_occur=999&term\\_src=title:21:chapter:22:section:1702](https://www.law.cornell.edu/definitions/uscode.php?width=840&height=800&iframe=true&def_id=21-USC-785215267-1862302916&term_occur=999&term_src=title:21:chapter:22:section:1702)

Conversely, while the ONDCP and the Biden-Harris Administration are focused on these priorities, Republicans are trying to shift over \$2 billion in funding for the Department of Homeland Security to construct a wholly ineffective border wall.<sup>5</sup> My Republican colleagues' obsession with building a wall ignores the very real need for increased investments to fight the flow of drugs like fentanyl and opioids into this country.

If my Republican colleagues really want to make border communities safer, they should focus on investing in proven solutions. For example, the ONDCP administers the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Program, or HIDTA. In 2022, HIDTAs seized \$22 billion in illicit drugs and cash. In 2020, the South Texas HIDTA region, which covers a key smuggling corridor that encompasses 50% of the Texas-Mexico border helped seize \$833 million in illegal drugs.<sup>6</sup> Without a doubt, the program is effective, earning an impressive return on investment of \$82 for every \$1 budgeted in 2022.<sup>7</sup> The reason for this high rate of return is simple—when we empower law enforcement agencies to go after drug traffickers more effectively, we seize more drugs and assets.

That is why I am proud to author an annual appropriations letter supporting funding for the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program housed at the Drug Enforcement Administration to fund our anti-narcotics activity where it is needed. And it is not just border-communities that benefit from the HIDTA program. Northern Virginia is part of the Washington/Baltimore HIDTA that spans other areas in the Commonwealth and parts of Maryland, D.C., and West Virginia. The region has its own unique challenges that make it a hotspot for drug trafficking—including 1,600 miles of Interstates, six major international airports, and almost 100 Amtrak trains traveling the region daily. Investing in HIDTA and reauthorizing the ONDCP should be a common-sense solution to help border communities and would do a lot more for all communities than my Republican colleagues' misguided focus on building a border wall.

Prevention and treatment are important tools in fighting this battle. I look forward to hearing from our witness, Dr. Rahul Gupta, Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy about the importance of a comprehensive approach to the drug crisis.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/news/press-releases/house-republicans-pass-homeland-security-bill-that-leaves-communities-less-safe>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/HIDTA-Annual-Report-to-Congress-2022.pdf>;  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/07/06/the-white-house-announces-nine-newly-designated-counties-across-america-are-joining-the-high-intensity-drug-trafficking-areas-program/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/briefing-room/2023/07/06/the-white-house-announces-nine-newly-designated-counties-across-america-are-joining-the-high-intensity-drug-trafficking-areas-program/>