

**STATEMENT OF
JUSTIN GARRIS
SECTION CHIEF
CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIVE DIVISION
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**AT A HEARING ENTITLED,
“Examining the Trump Administration’s Work Combatting Transnational
Cartels in Indian Country”**

**PRESENTED
July 22, 2025**



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Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, and other members on the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to submit a written statement.

My name is Justin Garris, and I am a Section Chief in the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Criminal Investigative Division, as the Criminal Investigative Division oversees all FBI matters related to Indian Country. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the FBI’s efforts to combat cartels in Indian Country. The Bureau is deeply committed to working in partnership with Tribal nations, federal and local agencies, and other components in the Department of Justice to address the evolving threat posed by transnational criminal organizations operating on sovereign Tribal lands.

Overview:

The FBI has investigative jurisdiction throughout the United States on a variety of federal crimes to include terrorism, counterintelligence, cybercrimes, and criminal matters like drug trafficking, bank robberies, gangs, health care fraud, and human trafficking. The FBI also has jurisdiction specific to Indian country that gives us investigative responsibility for violent crimes committed on many of the federally recognized Indian reservations across the country. The FBI shares that jurisdiction with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and conducts investigations alongside our partners at the federal, state, local and Tribal levels.

While major drug cartels are not typically based on reservations, we are increasingly seeing local gangs and criminal organizations with loose connections to these cartels exploit the



conditions in Indian Country to advance their operations. They take advantage of remote locations, limited law enforcement resources and the ability to sell drugs at higher prices due to reduced access. These groups traffic narcotics, launder money, and exert control through violence and intimidation. They target vulnerable communities and fuel cycles of abuse, fear and addiction. Addressing this threat requires close coordination. Together with our partners, we are working to make Tribal communities safer by focusing our efforts on the most dangerous and violent criminal offenders.

Countering Cartels in Indian Country:

To help combat criminal threats in Indian Country, the FBI uses all the tools and authorities at our disposal to disrupt potential threats. We use an intelligence-driven, victim-centered approach to dismantle criminal networks at every level. Through multi-agency task forces, enhanced information sharing and close coordination with Tribal law enforcement, we are disrupting supply chains, seizing illicit proceeds, and bringing violent offenders to justice.

In early May of 2025, the White House's Homeland Security Council announced the implementation phase of the new Homeland Security Task Forces (HSTFs). This model of fighting transnational criminal organizations (TCOs), including those that supply drugs to Indian Country, consolidates U.S. law enforcement and intelligence efforts into a targeted approach, eliminates duplicative investigations, and provides a more organized effort in combatting the TCOs. The HSTFs support the whole of government approach to investigating TCOs and disrupting their criminal activities both abroad and domestically. FBI Agents, analysts, and professional staff are assigned to HSTFs across the country.

With the creation of HSTFs and the designation of six Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) by the State Department in February of 2025, the FBI works with others in the Department of Justice to leverage new authorities against these cartels to stem the damage that they are inflicting in Indian Country. For example, the FTOs are now eligible to be charged with federal Material Support to Terrorism charges, which greatly enhances the FBI's ability to disrupt FTO cells throughout the country and internationally.

The FBI Criminal Investigative Division (CID) also partners with Mexican law enforcement and many federal, state, and local agencies on task forces targeting drugs that make their way to Indian Country. In February 2025, the FBI, as part of the Rocky Mountain Safe Trails Task Force, arrested three individuals—two of whom were illegal aliens—allegedly involved in a methamphetamine operation on a reservation. One of the individuals is believed to have ties to a Mexican TCO.

In Montana, cartels, particularly the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartels (CJNG), have targeted the state's reservations. They use various tactics to ingratiate



themselves with Tribal members and embed their operatives in Tribal communities to coordinate operations. They also approach low level distributors to expand the drug supply in an area already plagued by high levels of opioid addiction among Native Americans. The FTO designation of these two cartels and others has proven to be a valuable tool for the FBI in advancing our mission to disrupt cartel leadership and criminal activities.

TCOs also use Tribal land to exploit the porous border between the United States and Mexico. For example, the Tohono O’odham Nation in south-central Arizona runs along the U.S.-Mexico border for over 60 miles. TCOs take advantage of this vulnerability by trafficking drugs and illegal aliens into the United States through the region. The area serves as a transshipment zone for methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and marijuana destined for the United States.

A review of FBI pending cases reveals the FBI has approximately 20 active Indian Country Crimes (ICC) investigations with validated transnational organized crime connections. There are approximately 270 ICC drug investigations where a direct transnational organized crime connection has yet to be established but is still actively being investigated. The FBI also has approximately 10 pending ICC gang cases, which not only have a violent crime nexus (homicides, drive-by shootings, assaults, etc.) but may also have a drug trafficking nexus. The FBI will continue to evaluate these gang cases and will continue to evaluate investigations for connections to transnational organized crime.

Indian Country Investigations:

To fully understand the scope of the threat, it’s important to examine where these investigations are taking place. Thirty-one FBI field offices have Indian Country specific investigative jurisdiction. However, the vast majority (over 95%) of FBI Indian Country criminal investigations occur in the following field offices:

- o Albuquerque
- o Denver
- o Detroit
- o Minneapolis
- o Oklahoma City
- o Omaha
- o Portland
- o Phoenix
- o Seattle



- o Salt Lake City

Currently, there are more than 350 full-time FBI employees supporting Indian Country matters. That number includes more than 250 special agents, 14 intelligence analysts and 85 professional staff positions, including more than 40 victim specialists providing critical assistance to those affected by crime. We often surge additional personnel to support Indian Country investigations when needed. In the past two years, the FBI has expanded its presence in Indian Country by adding 45 additional agents and four new task forces. These enhancements have strengthened our ability to serve tribal communities more effectively than ever before.

While the FBI prioritizes investigations of the most serious violent crimes, we also conduct proactive drug investigations in Indian Country with the assistance of our law enforcement partners including Drug Enforcement Administration, BIA, and other law enforcement agencies. Through our Safe Trails Task Forces (STTF), the FBI partners with local, state, Tribal and other federal partners to address both violent crime and conduct proactive drug investigations. For more than 30 years, our STTFs have formed the bedrock of our partnerships in Indian Country. Through our 28 Safe Trails Task Forces across the United States, the FBI partners with agencies at all levels to target things like violent crime, illegal drugs, gangs, fraud, and crimes against children. STTFs are considered a force multiplier within the local communities they serve. Tribal law enforcement task force officers (TFOs) also provide invaluable assistance and intelligence related to the location of crime scenes and identity of suspects/victims. There are 28 STTFs with:

- o 500+ task force members
- o 201 participating Tribal/state/local agencies
- o 7 federal agencies

These partnerships are producing real results. In Washington state, the FBI and DEA partnered with federal, state, local and Tribal agencies in and around the Yakama Reservation for a joint investigation. Working together, the investigation resulted in the seizure of approximately 220 pounds of methamphetamine and nine kilograms of cocaine last month. It was the largest seizure ever recorded at this Reservation with an estimated street value of \$500,000.

As these dangerous criminal networks expand, so does the caseload facing our agents and partners on the ground. FBI special agents investigating Indian Country crimes often manage substantial caseloads driven by high rates of violent incidents, expansion of jurisdiction, and other challenges unique to Indian Country. As a result, the number of unresolved violent crime cases in Indian Country remains high. At the start of FY2025, the FBI's Indian Country program had approximately 4,300 open investigations. This included in part:



- o 900+ death investigations
- o 1,000 child sexual abuse investigations
- o 290 domestic violence investigations
- o 260 adult sexual abuse investigations
- o 1,264 arrests
- o Over 45 kilograms of drugs seized, including 36 kilograms of meth, 7.3 kilograms of fentanyl, 2.3 kilograms of marijuana, and 1.1 kilogram of cocaine.

In 2015, DOJ launched the Tribal Access Program for National Crime Information (TAP) in order to provide a means for Tribal law enforcement agencies to receive and share criminal justice information with databases maintained by the FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Division (CJIS), including the National Crime Information Center (NCIC). Access to FBI CJIS systems has improved public safety on reservations across the US and has helped Tribal law enforcement agencies more effectively work with their federal, state, and local counterparts to address crime including transnational cartel activity. Today, 148 federally recognized Tribes participate in TAP and that number continues to grow.

In 2023, Operation Not Forgotten (ONF) was created to surge resources to FBI field offices to address unresolved violent crime cases. Between FY2023 and FY2024, ONF surged personnel to assist with Indian Country violent crime investigations. Those personnel have provided investigative assistance to over 500 cases. In FY2025, ONF expanded to six months and currently involves a surge of over 60 FBI Special Agents and analysts to the FBI's Indian Country program.

The FBI makes a deliberate effort to keep our Tribal partners apprised of new and emerging investigative tools and techniques to further investigations.

Closing:

In closing, I just want to reiterate the FBI's unwavering commitment to bring justice to those in Indian Country. We appreciate the committee's interest and support in our ongoing efforts to disrupt and dismantle the criminal networks that operate on Tribal lands. Together, we are building stronger, safer communities. Thank you.