

STATEMENT OF

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Before the

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
United States House of Representatives

**EXAMINATION OF THE COORDINATION OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL  
EFFORTS BY THE OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY (ONDCP),  
INCLUDING THE FEDERAL RESPONSE TO THE OPIOID CRISIS**

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Chairman Elijah Cummings, Ranking Member Jordan, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you today to offer testimony highlighting the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program (HIDTA) and to the coordination of National Drug Control efforts by ONDCP.

I have been involved in drug law enforcement for over 36 years. My law enforcement career began as a local police patrol officer with the Houston Police Department, then 24 years as an agent with the Drug Enforcement Administration, where I retired upon being blessed with my current position as the Houston HIDTA Director.

There are four HIDTA regions in the State of Texas. The Houston HIDTA region essentially hugs the coastline of Texas from the Louisiana border down to the tip of Texas just north of Brownsville, Texas. Houston HIDTA is governed by an Executive Board comprised of 20 regional law enforcement agency heads, ten of which represent Federal law enforcement agencies, and ten of which represent state and local law enforcement agencies. Houston HIDTA targets those regional threats deemed most harmful to our communities, along with maritime threats specific to our Gulf Coast Region, domestic highway threats related to our vast highway infrastructure connecting Houston to the Southwest border, and drug seizures and arrests from the US Border Patrol Checkpoints.

The Houston HIDTA is fortunate in that we have not yet seen the opioid crisis ravage our communities as it has in some of the other HIDTA regions. Our biggest drug threats are methamphetamine, cocaine and synthetic drugs. However, we are alarmed that our region is experiencing increasing numbers of drug overdose deaths involving fentanyl, carfentanil and opioids, and we are diligently working with our law enforcement partners, as well as the prevention and treatment communities, to reduce these tragic and highly preventable deaths.

I have been involved with the HIDTA Program since 1991, when Houston was designated as one of the original five HIDTAs across the country. Without reservation, I can attest that this is the only law enforcement program in the country that successfully unites the sustained efforts of federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement to safeguard communities across this nation through the disruption and dismantlement of major drug trafficking organizations. The HIDTA Program has also demonstrated success in the development of other innovative and strategic partnerships in the public safety and public health realms. It is the placement of the program under ONDCP that gives rise to our continued success, while also providing for the requisite neutrality and equality between our federal, state and local partners.

ONDCP establishes priorities and objectives for the nation's drug policy. The Director is charged with producing the National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) that directs the nation's drug control efforts. The recently released strategy promotes a focused and balanced approach.

The HIDTA program is an essential component of the National Drug Control Strategy. The 29 regional HIDTAs are now active in all 50 states with the recent inclusion of Alaska, and includes Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. HIDTAs enhance and coordinate anti-drug abuse efforts from a local, regional, and national perspective, leveraging resources at all levels in a true partnership. The HIDTAs across the country provide ONDCP with real time and direct access to all regional drug issues to enhance their coordinated implementation of this Nation's drug control strategy.

At the national level, ONDCP provides policy direction and guidance to the HIDTA program. More importantly, at the regional level, HIDTAs have Executive Boards comprised of an equal

number of federal, state, local, and tribal agencies that govern each HIDTA's operations. This provides a balanced and equal voice in identifying the regional threat, developing a strategy, and assessing performance. The flexibility of this leadership model creates the ability for each Executive Board to quickly, effectively and efficiently adapt to emerging threats that may be unique to that HIDTA region.

The strengths of the HIDTA program are truly multi-dimensional. One of the cornerstones of the program is its demonstrated ability to bring people and agencies together to work toward a common goal. The neutrality of the HIDTA program is viewed as another key to its success. HIDTA is a program, not an agency. HIDTAs do not articulate the views of any one agency, nor are we endeared to the mandates of any one agency. HIDTA serves only to facilitate and coordinate the regional efforts of each of their individual Executive Boards. While the enforcement mission remains paramount, HIDTAs are also actively involved in drug prevention activities. The fact that we cannot arrest our way out of this drug problem is well recognized by the law enforcement community. The emerging partnership between public health and public safety has never been more important and HIDTA provides the perfect platform to promote that partnership.

Over the past three years, there has been some discussion about moving the HIDTA Program out of ONDCP and into the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). In my professional opinion, and as a retired DEA agent, I respectfully feel that this would be the beginning of the end of a highly successful program. Our existing position under ONDCP allows HIDTA the flexibility and adaptability to address emerging threats in a timely fashion with decision-making being made by the Executive Boards at the local level. ONDCP is an unbiased, non-competing organization with the expertise to work on this epidemic with HIDTA, using a holistic approach in dealing with it. ONDCP and the HIDTA program currently enjoy a collaborative and cooperative working relationship that has never been stronger, especially in light of the recent confirmation of ONDCP Director, James Carroll.

The cartels and transnational gangs targeted by HIDTA law enforcement initiatives across this country are predators that exist to make money and harm the communities of our nation. My

prior experience with DEA allowed me to see the inner workings of these cartels on a first hand basis and I do not see the difference between these cartels and many of the designated terroristic organizations also seeking the destruction of our society. The HIDTA Program is not arresting lower end users and addicts, but is targeting these large-scale drug trafficking organizations. In addition, the HIDTA program has implemented innovative strategies and partnerships with treatment and prevention partners, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to assist the addicted drug users of our country. HIDTA is effectively working hand in hand with ONDCP crafting an effective response to this nation's Opioid Crisis, and will continue to do so. It is imperative that HIDTAs remain under ONDCP in order to continue this good work. Now is the time for stability from a proven program not a successful program in transition during a Public Health/Public Safety emergency.

The HIDTA Directors across the country are extremely grateful to members of this Committee and your staff for your efforts in the Reauthorization of ONDCP through the Support for Patients and Communities Act. HIDTA Directors and many of the National State and Local Police organizations are also appreciative of the members of this Committee preventing the movement of the HIDTA Program and the Drug Free Communities (DFC) away from ONDCP in previous attempts.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.