



Department of Justice

STATEMENT

OF

**DOUGLAS W. COLEMAN
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PHOENIX FIELD DIVISION
DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION**

BEFORE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER AND MARITIME SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

AT A FIELD HEARING ENTITLED

**“STOPPING THE FLOW OF ILLICIT DRUGS IN ARIZONA BY
LEVERAGING STATE, LOCAL AND FEDERAL INFORMATION SHARING”**

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**Statement for the Record of
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Phoenix Field Division
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U.S. Department of Justice**

**Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives**

Distinguished members of the Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, on behalf of Administrator Leonhart and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), I appreciate your invitation to submit written testimony today regarding the growing threat of drug trafficking in the United States and DEA's efforts to share information with our federal, state, local and tribal partners.

Introduction

The mission of the Drug Enforcement Administration is to enforce the controlled substances laws and regulations of the United States and bring to the criminal and civil justice system of the United States, or any other competent jurisdiction, those organizations and principal members of organizations, involved in the growing, manufacture, or distribution of controlled substances appearing in or destined for illicit traffic in the United States.

DEA has the largest permanent U.S. investigative law enforcement presence overseas, and since its formation in 1973, has been assigned a global drug enforcement mission that extends far beyond our nation's borders. Currently, DEA has 85 offices in 65 countries.

National Information Sharing

DEA leads the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC), a multi-agency national tactical intelligence center that focuses its efforts on supporting law enforcement efforts in the Western Hemisphere, with a significant emphasis on the Southwest Border. Through its 24-hour Watch function, EPIC provides immediate access to participating agencies' databases to law enforcement agents, investigators, and analysts. This function is critical in the dissemination of relevant information in support of tactical and investigative activities, de-confliction and officer safety.

In support of national target deconfliction, DEA plays a primary role in both supporting and participating in the National Virtual Pointer System (NVPS). NVPS facilitates agents and officers coordinating investigations of common targets by connecting existing target deconfliction systems, such as those operated by the HIDTAs and RISS network, throughout the country. As agents and officers enter the subjects of current investigations, they are notified if another NVPS participant is also investigating that target. Point of contact information is exchanged and agents and officers contact one another to exchange detailed information.

In December 2008, DEA launched a National License Plate Reader (LPR) Initiative in direct response to the smuggling of illicit drug monies out of the United States, primarily via the U.S.-Mexico border. The LPR program promotes information sharing and coordination through a deconfliction mechanism that notifies the appropriate parties when common links are identified among investigations. This program uses existing U.S. law enforcement database capabilities with LPR technology to monitor and target vehicles commonly used to transport bulk cash and other contraband. The program is available to all federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement organizations through the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) and through the DEA Internet Connectivity Endeavor (DICE).

DICE enables any participating federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement agency to deconflict investigative information, such as phone numbers, email addresses, bank accounts, plane tail numbers and license plates, to identify investigative overlaps. The system, accessible through the Internet, allows users to be notified if an overlap occurs and provides points of contact information so users can discuss the investigative links.

Another example of DEA's commitment to information sharing is the Special Operations Division (SOD): a DEA led, multi-agency, operational coordination center whose mission is to establish seamless law enforcement strategies and operations aimed at dismantling national and international trafficking organizations by attacking their command and control communications. SOD facilitates coordination, deconfliction, and communication among DEA divisions and over twenty participating agencies identifying overlapping investigations and helps to ensure intelligence is shared between DEA and SOD's participating agencies. SOD has coordinated several of law enforcement's largest strikes against the cartels in recent years, bringing together federal law enforcement agencies, state and local law enforcement, and our foreign law enforcement counterparts to effect massive, coordinated enforcement action against the cartels to deliver maximum impact.

Further, DEA participates in the OCDETF Fusion Center (OFC), an operational intelligence center that provides federal law enforcement agencies with a complete intelligence picture of targeted drug trafficking organizations (DTO) and their financial infrastructure through enhanced technical capabilities and analysis in support of the OCDETF program.

Threat in Arizona

Arizona encompasses 24 percent of the entire 1,969 mile shared border with Mexico and houses six Ports of Entry (POEs). The Arizona/Mexico border provides many smuggling opportunities for the Sinaloa Cartel as well as other Mexican-based DTOs. This corridor is a primary transshipment zone for methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin and marijuana destined for United States markets. The cities of Phoenix and Tucson are home to large-scale organizations responsible for sourcing wholesale quantities of many illicit drugs to distribution cells throughout the U.S. Because of Arizona's proximity to the Mexico border, drug proceeds in the form of bulk currency flow from U.S. distribution cells back to Arizona-based drug cells for movement to Mexican traffickers.

DTOs operating in the Arizona corridor utilize independent organizations that specialize in smuggling drugs through the desert areas or POEs whereby drugs are concealed in compartments in vehicles or in cover loads on tractor trailers. Desolate areas between POEs act as primary smuggling routes for the large-scale marijuana transportation groups operating in this corridor. In addition, these transportation groups utilize the many national parks, monument areas, wildlife refuges, and Indian reservations along the Arizona/Mexico border. The Tohono O’Odham Indian reservation, which covers approximately 75 miles along the Arizona/Mexico border, is such a remote area that there is virtually no chance of detection by law enforcement. Additionally the tribal members have traditionally traveled to ancestral and sacred lands that they consider part of the Tohono O’odham Nation but are located just south of the border with Mexico.

DEA Response in Arizona

The DEA Phoenix Field Division (PFD) Intelligence Program is focused on the development and dissemination of law enforcement intelligence that drives and supports enforcement operations towards the highest level domestic and international targets. Through robust intelligence collection efforts and a vigorous Title-III/wire intercept program, the DEA PFD coordinates and disseminates drug-related investigative leads and valuable intelligence to our Mexico offices, SOD, EPIC and other DEA offices throughout the United States.

Since August 2011, DEA PFD has been leading the Arizona High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Investigative Support Center (ISC). The Arizona ISC is a combined federal, state, local and tribal initiative which serves as an information and law enforcement intelligence hub in support of Arizona’s HIDTA initiatives as well as other non-HIDTA law enforcement entities within Arizona. ISC Intelligence Analysts represent multiple agencies, including DEA, Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Arizona National Guard, Arizona’s Department of Public Safety, and law enforcement entities in Tempe, Tucson, and Maricopa County. All are co-located in both Tucson and Phoenix operating as one Investigative Support Center. These partnerships promote a dynamic intelligence and information sharing environment which is critical to the analytical focus of the ISC in its effort to support the various HIDTA initiatives in the detection, disruption, and dismantlement of drug trafficking and other associated criminal organizations. The collaborative focus of the ISC are as follows: to identify and de-conflict information to the fullest extent; to coordinate the dissemination of actionable intelligence; and to provide investigators potential targets and relevant information to expand investigations to the highest level in order to achieve the most significant impact on large-scale drug trafficking organizations. This streamlined analytical process facilitates the identification and reporting of drug trends and availability as well as emerging drug threats, officer safety issues, and an overall strategic picture for the southwest border area in Arizona.

The DEA Phoenix Field Division includes 11 Task Force groups located throughout the division and its subordinate offices. These task forces include seven DEA Task Force groups as well as four HIDTA groups. The PFD’s task force program includes 56 task force officers (TFO) representing 21 state and local law enforcement agencies from throughout the state of Arizona. The task force program supports state and local agencies throughout the state by providing

training, funding, investigative and intelligence resources, and federal deputation to state and local law enforcement agencies in Arizona. Task Force groups frequently work investigations with a local and/or regional focus that are brought to the respective groups by their state and local agency TFOs. Virtually every enforcement group in the PFD has state or local TFOs assigned to it. All DEA state and local TFOs are afforded access to all of the resources available to any DEA Special Agent.

In closing, DEA will continue to work with its federal, state, local and tribal counterparts to investigate, disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations operating globally, with a specific nexus to Arizona and its surrounding region. Furthermore, DEA will continue its priority of information sharing and coordination with all of our partners in the law enforcement community.