

**TESTIMONY OF CHARLES ADDINGTON
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STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
INVESTIGATIONS
HEARING ON EXAMINING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION’S WORK
COMBATTING TRANSNATIONAL CARTELS IN INDIAN COUNTRY**

JULY 22, 2025

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the U.S. Department of the Interior (Department or DOI) regarding the Trump Administration’s work combatting transnational cartels in Indian Country.

My name is Charles Addington. I am an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation and currently serve as the Principal Director of Justice Services and Law Enforcement for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior. I have over 33 years of law enforcement experience, 28 of which has been in the management of Indian Country law enforcement programs. I recently returned to federal service after retiring at the end of 2021 with more than 20 years of service with the Department, working in Indian Affairs. In January 2022, I began working as an Executive Director of Public Safety for a tribally compacted public safety program until my return to federal service.

Introduction

The BIA has a service population of nearly 2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives who belong to 574 federally recognized tribes. The BIA, through the BIA Office of Justice Services (OJS) supports 198 law enforcement programs with 32 BIA operated programs and 166 tribally operated programs. Approximately 78 percent of the total BIA OJS programs are contracted with tribes as authorized under Public Law 93-638, as amended, or compacted with tribes as authorized under Title IV of the Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act, as amended. Additionally, many tribes supplement BIA OJS funding with funding from their tribe’s treasury, grants from the Department of Justice (DOJ), or other sources. Under Public Law 83-280 and similar legislation, many tribes subject to P.L. 280 rely on state and local law enforcement to combat crimes occurring on the reservation.

BIA OJS provides a wide range of law enforcement, corrections and other specialized services to Indian Country. These services include uniform police services, criminal investigations, detention, tribal courts, drug enforcement, internal affairs and basic and advanced training conducted by the Indian Police Academy. BIA OJS is statutorily responsible for enforcing federal law and, with the consent of a tribe, tribal law within Indian Country.

Drug Enforcement in Indian Country

Indian Country continues to experience elevated crime rates in many tribal communities. Drug-related activity in Indian Country continues to be a major contributor to violent crime and imposes serious health and economic hardships on our tribal communities.

BIA OJS continues to maintain a specialized national drug enforcement division which is the largest nationwide network of drug enforcement agents dedicated solely to Indian Country that are specifically designed to investigate the distribution of illegal narcotics in Indian Country. In FY2025, the BIA Division of Drug Enforcement (DDE) was comprised of 53 BIA Drug Enforcement Agents that are strategically located throughout the country and are mostly assigned to federal, tribal or state Drug Task Forces across the United States. These partnerships allow us to employ a force multiplier approach and better share intelligence across agencies in our efforts to combat illicit drugs in tribal communities. In the past to ensure we partnered closely with tribes operating their own public safety programs, so tribal law enforcement had the ability to assign officers to these drug task forces.

Another benefit to our drug agents working alongside federal, tribal and state partners on these task forces, is that it allows them to conduct highly technical investigations such as Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces cases, High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area cases, court ordered Title III wire intercepts, Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization cases, synthetic cannabinoid cases, and cases crossing multi-jurisdictional boundaries.

The use of methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, and prescription drugs, combined with a sharp rise in the distribution of illicit fentanyl in recent years, continues to have a devastating impact on tribal families and communities. Many of these drugs, including those trafficked by Mexican cartels, have become significantly more potent, with a heightened capacity to cause impairment. Use of these powerful substances often leads to severely impaired behavior, increasing the risk of violence, criminal activity, and even death.

Fentanyl and other synthetic drugs, like methamphetamine, are responsible for nearly all the fatal drug overdoses and poisonings in our country. Indian Country has not been excluded from these overdoses and deaths.

Fentanyl manufactured by the Mexican cartels is the main driver behind the ongoing epidemic of drug overdoses in the United States. Fentanyl is being distributed in numerous forms such as a powder or hidden in other powder drugs such as cocaine, heroin and in fake prescription pills. When hidden in other drugs, users often take these drugs without knowing they contain fentanyl, which greatly increases the risk of overdose from ingestion or through unprotected contact with the deadly drug.

The strong opioid properties of fentanyl have made it an attractive drug. The ease of with which fentanyl can be acquired compounded by its potent narcotic effects has drastically increased the risk of overdose and deaths in our tribal communities.

One recent example was when the BIA DDE actively supported the Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) Operation Overdrive initiative by conducting a simultaneous Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) deployment operation within the exterior boundaries of, and with a nexus to, the Yakama Nation Indian Reservation in Washington State. Drug Agents reported averaging approximately 20 overdoses a month at an incorporated city located within the exterior boundaries of the Yakama Indian Reservation prior to them conducting a joint drug operation. This operation netted multiple federal arrests and the seizure of more than \$44 million dollars in illegal narcotics and real property and since the end of the operation only one overdose has been reported. Although one overdose is still too many, federal efforts to partner with other law enforcement agencies to conduct these types of operations are showing great success in reducing the potential number of senseless deaths within Indian Country.

BIA Drug Agents have seen an increase in the seizure of fake prescription pills containing fentanyl being trafficked in or through Indian Country which present an extreme danger to the public who may come in contact with this deadly drug. Most of these fake pills are made to look nearly identical to real prescription pills, such as oxycodone (M30, Percocet); hydrocodone (Vicodin); or alprazolam (Xanax) and the fentanyl content in these fake pills can only be determined after analyzed by a laboratory.

Another recent example was last month when a woman was charged with federal drug trafficking after a significant seizure was made during a routine traffic stop by a BIA DDE K-9 Officer on Interstate 40 within the Laguna Pueblo Reservation in New Mexico. The BIA K-9 officer conducted a traffic stop on the vehicle and the officer detected the odor of marijuana and observed drug paraphernalia in plain view upon approaching the vehicle. The BIA K-9 officer conducted a probable cause search of the vehicle, locating additional drug paraphernalia and Xanax pills in the front passenger area. In the trunk, the officer discovered a large black duffle bag containing a substantial quantity of blue pills, and field tests later confirmed the pills as fentanyl, with a gross weight of 122.22 pounds, equating to approximately 504,140 pills with a street value of approximately \$20 million dollars.

The specific type of illicit drugs found in Indian Country varies by region and is largely influenced by what drugs are readily available in larger cities near reservations. While marijuana and methamphetamine are the illicit substances we see most widely used, the distribution of fentanyl pills has increased in many tribal communities (see increase in 2024 fentanyl seizures in Table 1).

The most illicit drugs available throughout Indian Country are not manufactured on the reservations but rather transported into Indian Country by independent dealers who travel to nearby cities to purchase the drugs primarily from well-organized Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) who set up their distribution operations in proximity to tribal communities through developing close relationships with local tribal residents who live there.

While individual drug users generally engage in property crimes to support their addiction, drug traffickers often engage in violent crimes to facilitate their operations. Mexican DTOs, the principal wholesale suppliers and producers of most illicit drugs available in tribal communities, pose the greatest “organized” threat.

At the beginning of 2018, an intense effort was put forth by the Department when it established DOI Opioid Task Forces that specifically targeted high-traffic drug areas throughout Indian Country. BIA Drug Enforcement Agents, tribal police officers and our federal and state law enforcement partners began tackling the drug epidemic on the reservations which led to hundreds of arrests and hundreds of pounds of narcotics being seized. BIA OJS also implemented a Tip411 application specifically to report illegal drug activity that allowed community members to report drug activity directly to BIA Drug Agents through a smart phone app or text message. The new tools were promoted through social media and Tip411 flyers were placed in local communities. However, in 2022, the DOI Opioid Task Forces was no longer being prioritized by the Department, the BIA Tip phone app was discontinued, and the focus was shifted to other priorities which likely contributed to the decrease in illegal narcotics seized since 2022 (see decrease in 2023 and 2024 overall drug totals in Table 2).

Moving Forward Toward Success

The Department is currently working to bring back collaborative initiatives similar to Operation Dakota Peace Keeper, Presidential High Performance Priority Goal (HPPG) Protecting Indian Country, DOI Opioid Task Forces, Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) Operations and Operation Lady Justice to reduce violent crime, dismantle illegal drug activity and address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) incidents occurring within our tribal communities.

In recent months, BIA has conducted six MET deployments to reservations across the nation, making multiple drug related arrests, seizing firearms and millions of dollars worth of illegal narcotics through investigations or K-9 actions. Turning our efforts back to an intelligence led police philosophy will guide our enforcement efforts to ensure we are executing effective drug enforcement operation that have proper planning and designed at dismantling and disrupting these Mexican DTO’s from operating within Indian Country and their surrounding communities. Working closely with our federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement partners as we execute these enforcement actions will allow us to employ a force multiplier approach to combat illicit drugs in our tribal communities.

Workforce Impacts and Staffing

The Department fully recognizes the challenges involved in policing within Indian Country and remains committed to delivering quality services across all areas to ensure we maintain safe Indian Country communities.

Since 2017, the Department has issued the “Report to the Congress on Spending, Staffing, and Estimated Funding Costs for Public Safety and Justice Programs in Indian Country” (TLOA report) to Congress each year which contains staffing models and unmet needs data for law enforcement, corrections and tribal courts in Indian Country. The report provides a total estimated public safety and justice staffing need for Indian Country public safety programs, allowing Congress to be informed about these unmet needs of these programs.

Pay parity was talked about in last year’s testimony and we are currently looking at ways to navigate some prior actions in this area. In FY2023, BIA upgraded their uniformed police officer positions, which increased salaries up to an additional \$30,000 annually for BIA law enforcement officers without first requesting and receiving additional appropriations from Congress to cover these costs. This forced BIA to reduce the number of uniformed police officer positions that could have been filled at direct service agencies.

The BIA also did not request or allocate any additional funding to tribal contracted or compacted programs to support increases in officer pay. While we support raising officers’ salaries, the way it was implemented has had unintended consequences by reducing the number of BIA officer positions that can be filled at BIA agencies, widening pay disparities between BIA and tribal law enforcement, and failing to produce any meaningful net increase in the number of uniformed BIA officers currently serving on the ground.

To increase the number of boots on the ground, the Department is actively pursuing strategies for better recruitment and retention that will bolster our ability to be competitive with recruiting candidates. We are looking at ways to enhance hiring flexibilities, improve employee housing, address pay parities, evaluate training center locations, and other benefits for new and current BIA and Tribal public safety staff.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department regarding the Trump Administration’s work combatting transnational cartels in Indian country. I look forward to our continued work together to improve public safety across all of Indian country and will address any questions you may have.

TABLE 1

Division of Drug Enforcement Fentanyl Seizures		
Fiscal Year	Sum of Fentanyl Powder (lbs.)	Sum of Fentanyl Pills (drug units)
2018		17,900.00
2019	0.01	3,463.00
2020	8.92	257,491.00
2021	38.42	108,064.97
2022	45.50	263,411.00
2023	74.69	498,103.08
2024	140.48	1,037,626.84
Total	308.02	2,186,059.89

TABLE 2

Amount of Drugs Seized (pounds)					Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.				
	2016 Achieved	2017 Achieved	2018 Achieved	2019 Achieved	2020 Achieved	2021 Achieved	2022 Achieved	2023 Achieved	2024 Achieved
Cocaine Powder	105.70	54.15	34.19	96.8	38.5	797.4	173.513	67.112	56.17
Cocaine Crack	0.375	0.60	110.56	1.0	1.4	0.56	.6134	1327.460	3.16
Heroin	67.83	16.49	47.89	42.1	64.5	162.9	40.580	10.193	6.65
MDMA (Ecstasy)	29.16	0.29	.33	7.7	2.6	1.5	101.416	4.789	2.51
Meth Crystal	64.21	56.13	248.21	72.6	336	188.36	2866.958	514.399	84.07
Meth Powder	20.93	34.88	264.46	475.7	1,019.9	880.4	636.095	1295.247	1,007.52
Processed Marijuana	2,173	6,223.89	19,413.62	5,460.9	4,413.5	50,660	6988.911	6429.285	995.41
Prescription Drugs Seized	96.21	8.0	53.66	106.2	12.3	54.04	28.539	34.343	1.32
Other Drugs Seized	70.78	409	227.63	15,220.6	125.2	764.3	3361.338	693.693	925.37
Marijuana (# Plants = lbs.)	13,979	6,097	42,201	666.1	10,862.7	232,455	3531.78	119.276	252.21
Totals in Pounds	16,607	12,900	62,601.49	22,149.6	16,876.6	285,964.11	17,729.75	10,492.80	3,334.40