

End Fentanyl Trafficking with Local Task Forces Act

One essential component to addressing the opioid epidemic is providing multi-jurisdictional drug task forces (MJTFs) with the resources they need to combat opioid trafficking. In Washington state and around the country, law enforcement agencies partner across jurisdictions to form MJTFs to coordinate information, resources, and staff to target the illegal distribution of drugs at the local and regional levels.

While individual law enforcement agencies have been essential for addressing opioid trafficking, their reach is limited by local resources and jurisdictional boundaries. The distribution of opioids is not isolated to any single area, district, or police agency, and trafficking operations frequently cross different police jurisdictions. Traffickers can exploit this decentralization in law enforcement by straddling jurisdictional boundaries,¹ complicating investigations into drug trades and making it more difficult to hold criminal organizations accountable for pouring fentanyl into communities.

The White House National Drug Control Strategy supports strengthening MJTFs and has identified them as an effective approach for mitigating jurisdictional challenges and closing gaps in law enforcement activity.² Multiple states, including Washington, have supported MJTFs with federal funding from programs like the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) Program,³ but local stakeholders have expressed the need for additional federal support, especially as JAG funds are being diverted to fund other initiatives.⁴

Tribal lands are particularly vulnerable to opioid trafficking because of the unique jurisdictional gaps between Tribal and non-Tribal law enforcement agencies. Tribal leaders have expressed concern that the remote nature of some of their lands, coupled with a lack of federal investment in their communities, makes them major targets for traffickers seeking to expand their operations. A 2022 CDC report found that Tribal nations have been disproportionately affected by the opioid epidemic, with American Indian and Alaska Native residents having the highest drug overdose deaths nationally.⁵ Incentivizing partnerships between Tribal and non-Tribal law enforcement is critical for protecting these communities and stemming larger trafficking operations.

The *End Fentanyl Trafficking with Local Task Forces Act* will invest in multi-jurisdictional drug task forces (MJTFs), helping law enforcement to coordinate their efforts across jurisdictions, plug gaps in anti-trafficking activity, and more effectively respond to the opioid epidemic. Specifically, it would:

- **Expand and formalize an existing Department of Justice (DOJ) program** administered by the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office – the Anti-Heroin Task Force (AHTF) – to fund multi-jurisdictional task forces to target opioid trafficking.
- **Help law enforcement expand partnerships** across federal, state, Tribal, and local agencies to address opioid trafficking.
- **Allow funds to be used** to create new, or expand existing, multi-jurisdictional drug task forces; hire and train law enforcement officers and other support employees; procure equipment, technology, and support systems; and pay overtime.
- **Require 40 percent of funding** to be made directly available to Indian Tribes (20 percent) and MJTFs (20 percent), which will help promote local law enforcement goals and limit the administrative burdens and additional requirements associated with using pass-through entities to secure funding.
- **Authorize funding that doubles** the amount historically provided to the AHTF to robustly support MJTFs and anti-trafficking efforts.
- **Permit the COPS director to provide technical assistance**, including through training centers and facilities, to instruct law enforcement and MJTFs on best practices for combating opioid trafficking.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/National-Drug-Control-2022Strategy.pdf>

² Ibid

³ https://www.ncja.org/_files/ugd/cda224_5c20b833f2a14aaeb334a736ff0c60fc.pdf?index=true (FY2018)

⁴ <https://larsen.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2799>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db457.pdf>