



# U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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STATEMENT

OF

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U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT  
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

REGARDING A HEARING ON

*“FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVE: IMPROVING SECURITY, TRADE, AND  
TRAVEL FLOWS AT SOUTHWEST BORDER PORTS OF ENTRY”*

BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON HOUSE COMMITTEE AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND BORDER MANAGEMENT

Wednesday, November 17, 2021  
2:30 P.M.

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

Chairwoman Sinema, Ranking Member Lankford, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management:

### **Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the efforts of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) to secure the homeland from transnational crime and threats. My statement will focus on the important role HSI plays internationally and domestically in identifying, disrupting, and dismantling transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that seek to exploit the global infrastructure through which international trade, travel, and finance move. TCOs represent a significant national security threat, their illicit proceeds are used to exert political influence and destabilize fledgling democracies and their corruptive influence create opportunities for malign influence in our hemisphere.

As the principal investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), HSI is a premier global law enforcement organization responsible for conducting federal criminal investigations at every critical location in the cycle: in cooperation with foreign counterparts, internationally where transnational criminal and terrorist organizations operate; in coordination with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), at our Nation's physical border and ports of entry (POEs) where illicit smuggling cells attempt to exploit America's legitimate trade, travel, and transportation systems; and in cities throughout the United States, where criminal organizations earn substantial profits off their illicit activities.

The missions of HSI and CBP are intricately connected and complimentary. Neither agency can fully succeed in its efforts to secure the homeland without resolute commitment and support from the other nor can HSI and CBP maximize their collective contributions to homeland security without coordinating and deconflicting law enforcement responses and actions.

In collaboration with its strategic partners in the United States and abroad, HSI special agents gather evidence used to identify and build criminal cases against TCOs, terrorist networks and facilitators, and other criminal elements that threaten the homeland. HSI works with prosecutors to indict and arrest violators, execute criminal search warrants, seize criminally derived money and assets, and take other actions designed to disrupt and dismantle criminal organizations operating around the world. These efforts protect national security and public safety in the United States.

Conducting criminal investigations and prosecution resulting from arrests associated with CBP seizures is necessary for ensuring rule of law; however, HSI's mandate is to use multi-defendant, multijurisdictional, complex investigations to disrupt and dismantle TCOs. CBP plays a key role to disrupt the efforts of dangerous Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) that traffic illicit substances through our borders, at and between ports of entry. These efforts are realized in the impressive seizures of narcotics, weapons, currency, and contraband. HSI investigations of land border contraband seizures are necessary to degrade TCO capabilities and/or imprison TCO leadership. HSI aims to push beyond U.S. borders and stem illegal activity that targets the homeland from abroad. HSI authorities do not start or stop at POEs or along the borders, but rather extend into international domains and into the interior of the United States.

## HSI International Efforts

HSI's international presence is a key facet of its approach to countering transnational organized crime. HSI special agents abroad develop and foster relationships with host government law enforcement partners to exchange information; coordinate and support investigations; and facilitate enforcement actions and prosecutions to deter the ability of TCOs to smuggle drugs, people, and other contraband into and out of the United States. HSI and its foreign counterparts identify and target sources of supply and identify and disrupt transportation and smuggling routes. These efforts enable HSI and its partners to prevent dangerous narcotics and other illicit goods from reaching our borders, or to stop illicit southbound flows of illegally derived currency or weapons.

HSI is the largest international investigative presence in DHS and comprises 80 offices in over 50 countries with 41 visa security screening posts. HSI focuses on expanding the borders out, leaning forward in our approach to identify and mitigate threats before they reach our borders. This multi-tiered, multi-pronged strategy is one which spans international boundaries and crosses all investigative program areas.

In 2011, HSI established the **Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit (TCIU)** Program to act as a force multiplier in the fight against TCOs. HSI TCIUs comprise foreign law enforcement officials, customs officers, immigration officers, and prosecutors who undergo a strict vetting process. Upon completion of vetting, candidates must complete a three-week International Task-force Agent Training course. HSI TCIUs facilitate information exchange and rapid bilateral investigations involving violations within HSI's investigative authority, including weapons trafficking and counter-proliferation; money laundering and bulk cash smuggling; human smuggling and trafficking; narcotics smuggling; transnational gang activity; child exploitation; and cybercrime. TCIUs enhance the host country's ability to investigate and prosecute individuals involved in transnational criminal activity that threatens the stability and security of the region and, ultimately, our homeland security. More than 430 vetted and trained foreign law enforcement officers comprise the 11 TCIUs and two International Task Force units. HSI special agents are uniquely positioned to partner with TCIU personnel to provide critical intelligence and resources to allow our partners to take appropriate enforcement action under the authority of the host country.

Recognizing the regional nature of TCOs within South and Central America, HSI launched **Operation Citadel** in 2013 to identify, disrupt, and dismantle TCOs and terrorist support networks by targeting the mechanisms used to move migrants, illicit funds, and contraband throughout the region. Operation Citadel provides resources to enhance foreign partners' investigative, intelligence, and information sharing capabilities to counter transnational threats and organized crime. This collaboration provides HSI the ability to expand domestic and international investigations beyond U.S. borders and to more effectively target the illicit pathways exploited by TCOs. Operation Citadel facilitates training and capacity-building through cross-border operations with partner nation TCIUs, including undercover operations, judicially approved wire intercepts, and document and media exploitation at POEs and along smuggling routes.

Pushing our borders out to effectively identify and mitigate threats before they reach the United States remains a priority for DHS, HSI, and our counterparts. Through the **Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert Program (BITMAP)**, HSI trains and equips TCIUs and other cooperating foreign law enforcement officers to collect and share biometric and biographic data on persons-of-interest, such as third-country nationals who are encountered by foreign law enforcement agencies. Foreign law enforcement partners share their collected BITMAP information with HSI, and this biometric data is used to populate United States databases and subsequently identify transnational criminals; known or suspected terrorists; gang members; and other persons-of-interest. BITMAP information is also used to provide host nation law enforcement partners with actionable intelligence related to terrorist, criminal, and national security threats.

Since 2013, HSI, through its **Visa Security Program (VSP)**, assigns special agents to diplomatic posts to conduct law enforcement visa security activities and provide additional training in coordination with consular section Fraud Prevention Units and ARSO-Is to Department of State offices regarding threats, trends, and other topics affecting visa adjudication. VSP screening and vetting of visa applicants uses Pre-Adjudicated Threat Recognition and Intelligence Operations Teams (PATRIOT), an interagency endeavor with CBP, to identify national security and other visa eligibility concerns at the earliest point of an individual's visa application life cycle. VSP annually screens over two million applicants at 41 posts in 28 countries, creating a technologically advanced investigative window of opportunity.

In January 2016, HSI initiated **Operation Northern Triangle**, in which HSI Special Agents assigned to domestic gang units are deployed to HSI attaché offices within the Northern Triangle to assist with targeting MS-13 gang members and other Northern Triangle-based TCOs operating in or connected to the United States. The initiative focuses on developing and furthering Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force investigations across the United States and in the Northern Triangle countries. The agents coordinate with HSI attaché office personnel, TCIU members, local law enforcement, and other federal agencies to augment, assist, and provide expertise to advance investigations into TCOs.

HSI's **National Targeting Center (NTC) - Investigations Unit** was established in December 2013, in collaboration with CBP, to enhance our shared border security mission. HSI's increased manpower and concerted efforts at the NTC support the entire border security continuum, from CBP interdictions and HSI investigations, to the joint exploitation of intelligence. Working in a collaborative environment at the NTC, CBP and HSI provide support to HSI Domestic and International offices by targeting illicit precursor movements within commercial modalities of transportation, including air and maritime. HSI uses a multi-layered intelligence targeting methodology to process and analyze large volumes of data. HSI employs multiple data streams and the subject matter expertise of CBP Officers to illuminate anomalous shipments indicative of illicit contraband, including precursor movements. The focus of this multi-agency taskforce is to degrade the TCO supply chain by targeting global maritime container shipments through emerging technologies and industry intelligence data. As a result, HSI has been successful in the detection and seizure of containerized shipments of contraband and investigative efforts have identified a U.S nexus for precursor chemicals being sent directly from China to Mexico. Thus far, this methodology has resulted in seizures of approximately 400,000 kilograms of fentanyl and methamphetamine precursor chemicals. HSI anticipates that these precursor chemicals will

be utilized in the manufacturing of narcotics ultimately destined for the United States. Since Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, HSI maritime efforts have resulted the seizure of approximately 218,000 kilograms of narcotics and \$17.4 million in illicit proceeds.

Established in 2006, HSI's **Extraterritorial Criminal Travel (ECT)** program is a partnership between HSI and the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Criminal Division, Human Rights, and Special Prosecutions Section. The program uses dedicated investigative, prosecutorial, and intelligence resources to target and aggressively pursue, disrupt, and dismantle foreign-based transnational human smuggling networks. ECT supports the highest-priority human smuggling investigations posing the greatest national security and public safety threats. These include investigations concerning special interest noncitizens and investigations that pose a significant humanitarian concern, including maritime smuggling, extortion, kidnapping, and corruption.

### **HSI Domestic Efforts (Border)**

HSI's efforts continue at the border and within our field offices throughout the United States, where HSI special agents respond to and investigate schemes that are encountered or identified at the U.S. Border. These leads come to us in a variety of ways, including border interdictions; referrals from federal, state, and local law enforcement partners; confidential informants and sources of information; tip line or social media reporting; community relations and public affairs outreach; criminal analysis/targeting; and information gleaned from existing operations.

At POEs along the Southwest land border, smugglers use a wide variety of tactics and techniques for concealing illicit contraband. Our special agents work every day with CBP officers from the Office of Field Operations to identify, seize, and investigate drug smuggling organizations that attempt to exploit POEs to introduce illicit contraband into the United States. As such, HSI focuses on disrupting and dismantling priority TCOs by working with CBP on collecting, analyzing, and exploiting information gathered from interdictions by CBP and other law enforcement partners to further ongoing investigations; develop and pursue additional investigative leads; and execute enforcement actions to disrupt criminal activity, all with the ultimate goal of building criminal cases against active TCOs that will result in dismantling their operations.

In response to threats along the Southwest Border, HSI has assigned more than 1,655 special agents and 200 criminal analysts at our Southwest Border offices. In FY 2021, HSI's investigative efforts along the Southwest Border (within 5 Special Agent in Charge offices) resulted in 10,214 arrests, 5,933 indictments and 4,684 convictions.

The following HSI initiatives are used to combat TCOs:

In December 2012, the ***Jaime Zapata Border Enforcement Security Taskforce (BEST) Act*** was signed into law. It was named in memory of Jaime Zapata, an HSI special agent assigned to a BEST unit, who was killed in the line of duty in Mexico. This law amended the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to formally establish the BEST program, with the primary mission of combating emerging and existing transnational organized crime by employing a threat-based/risk mitigation investigative task force model that recognizes the unique resources and capabilities of all participating law enforcement partners.

BESTs eliminate the barriers between federal and local investigations, close the gap with international partners in multinational criminal investigations, and create an environment that minimizes the vulnerabilities in our operations that TCOs have traditionally capitalized on to exploit our nation's land and sea borders. BEST units are designed to incorporate other DHS-partner agencies, including CBP, U.S. Coast Guard, and the Transportation Security Administration, and are vehicles for establishing unity of effort, the cornerstone of a successful DHS mission. BEST units further solidify HSI's role as the primary investigative entity for DHS.

There are currently 80 BESTs located across the United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, comprising more than 2,000 law enforcement officers and personnel representing more than 200 federal, state, local, tribal, and international law enforcement agencies, and National Guard units. These personnel include HSI special agents, task force officers, intelligence analysts, and investigative support personnel. Since inception through the end of FY 2020, BESTs have collectively initiated more than 36,000 investigations resulting in more than 48,000 criminal arrests and seizures of more than 2.7 million pounds of narcotics, 25,000 weapons, and more than \$512 million in cash/monetary instruments.

In response to the rising threat of cartel violence using American-sourced firearms, HSI and CBP conceptualized **Operation Without a Trace** (WaT), a unified effort that focuses on the illicit purchase, transport, and distribution of firearms, firearms components, and ammunition from the U.S. to Mexico. As a federal partnership between HSI; CBP; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); and the Government of Mexico, WaT is also one of only three whole-of-government efforts recognized by the National Security Council to combat this threat. WaT's three-pronged approach leverages intelligence, interdiction, and investigative assets to identify, disrupt, and dismantle transnational criminal organizations trafficking firearms. In July 2021, WaT spearheaded a campaign via an established ICE Tip Line campaign aimed at eliciting information from the public regarding firearms trafficking. Since its inception in 2019, Operation WaT has initiated 531 criminal investigations which resulted in 358 arrests, the seizure of 1,428 firearms and 4,713 magazines, as well as more than 691,000 rounds of ammunition, all destined for TCOs in Mexico.

**Operation Silent Night** is a national collaborative effort between HSI, CBP, ATF, USPIS and local law enforcement targeting firearm suppressors that are smuggled into the United States. The global strategy for this initiative seeks to address the manufacturing, marketing and sale of these components in China illuminate the pathways by which funds are being transmitted to the People's Republic of China to procure this contraband. HSI has identified gaps in targeting threats developing from home-grown extremist groups and is collaborating with Department of Defense (DoD) military branch associations for additional vetting and targeting strategies of these extremist groups. Since inception in 2019, Operation Silent Night produced 1,971 referrals and 944 new criminal investigations, 201 arrests, seizure of 4,822 firearms, 4,876 suppressors and more than 120,000 rounds of ammunition as well as approximately \$1.6 million in illicit proceeds.

DHS and the Department of Justice (DOJ) continue to identify strategies to counter the TCOs facilitating and profiting from the increased influx of irregular migrants originating from Central

America and Mexico and transiting to the United States. **Joint Task Force Alpha (JTF-A)** is one facet of the U.S. government's response to this problem. Initiated by DOJ and launched in partnership with DHS, JTF-A is a multiagency operation designed to identify, target, investigate, and prosecute known TCOs engaged in human smuggling from Mexico and/or through the Northern Triangle countries to the Southwest border.

Enhancing effective prosecution of HSI human smuggling investigations is a key component of JTFA's mission. From FY 2019 through FY 2021, HSI has initiated more than 7,400 new human smuggling investigations, arrested 13,684 and convicted 5,000 subjects involved at all levels of human smuggling organizations. DOJ has evaluated and identified a subset of these cases for inclusion in the initial JTFA efforts and will be the foundation of DOJ's prosecutorial focus.

### **HSI Domestic Efforts (Interior)**

The multi-faceted, complex, transnational nature of the crimes surrounding illicit activity requires an equally robust and layered investigative response. This starts abroad, where HSI has the largest international investigative presence in DHS. This approach continues domestically, where HSI Special Agents and criminal analysts assigned to over 220 offices across the United States respond to and pursue investigations into illicit smuggling and trafficking.

As previously highlighted, BEST units have been and continue to be the primary vehicle used to carry out part of HSI's comprehensive, multi-layered strategy to address the national opioid epidemic. HSI has increased the number of BEST units at international mail facilities (IMF), express consignment hubs and international airports acting as IMFs, as part of HSI's targeted response to the opioid crisis. This strategy facilitates the immediate application of investigative techniques on seized parcels, which aid in establishing the probable cause needed to effect enforcement actions on individuals associated with fentanyl-laden parcels.

Between FYs 2018-2021, BEST units at international airports, IMFs, and express consignment hubs initiated more than 3,790 investigations resulting in more than 2,750 criminal arrests and seizures of more than 68,400 pounds of illicit drugs and/or drug precursors. These seizures included nearly 590 pounds of fentanyl, and over \$52 million in cash/monetary instruments. These law enforcement operations have disrupted the movement of illicit opioids and opioid precursors transiting through the mail and express consignment shipments and have aided in the dismantling of distribution networks.

Through **Operation Die Another Day**, which began in 2019, HSI and CBP partnered to address the opioid epidemic in the United States. This collaborative effort, which also includes the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and United States Postal Service, established a methodology for intelligence gathering, lead generation, and strategies to detect, prevent, and prosecute those engaged in unlawful activity. Operation Die Another Day focuses on the importation of pill presses, die molds, capsule fillers, and binding agents used by fentanyl, opioid, and designer drug traffickers. In FY 2021, Operation Die Another Day referred 341 leads to HSI field offices resulting in 1,068 pounds of narcotics being seized and 48 criminal arrests.

The **Chemical Company Outreach** campaign educates public and private sector, specifically domestic chemical manufacturers who export precursor chemicals to Central and South America,

on “know your customer” practices. In doing so, HSI, CBP, DEA and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) have partnered and hope to reduce the flow of opioids into the United States by gaining insight into supply chain and transportation methods and identifying bad actors who exploit these industries for illicit purposes.

HSI’s **National Bulk Cash Smuggling Center (BCSC)** is a critical component of the agency’s efforts related to criminal financing. The center operates strategic programs that leverage advanced data analytics, interagency partnerships, and law enforcement technology systems to identify complex money laundering networks and provide support for HSI financial investigations.

The criminal intelligence functions of the BCSC provide operational analysis in support of HSI-led interdiction efforts including port profiles highlighting cash flow activity at targeted POEs and corridor analyses to assist in planning the timing, location, and strategy for interdiction operations. The BCSC has also published Currency and Monetary Instrument Report Filing Summaries and Discrepancy Reports, which identify potential targets for investigation through cross-referencing U.S. and foreign currency declarations. The Center also administers a targeted, investigation-focused license plate reader program to identify larger criminal networks and a warrant-based GPS tracking program that provides valuable intelligence into the behaviors of criminal groups engaged in bulk cash smuggling.

In March 2020, the BCSC partnered with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and established **Operation Aquila** to detect the movement of illicit value in the mail stream. Through joint-agency analysis of law enforcement seizure data, USPIS and HSI identify money laundering networks that transfer bulk currency in both domestic parcels and international shipments. In the 18 months since its inception, Operation Aquila has identified \$13.5 million in suspected illicit proceeds, generated investigative target packages for HSI special agents and USPIS inspectors, and responded to more than 350 requests for support of money laundering investigations.

Since transnational criminal organizations have diversified to use virtual currencies to launder illicit proceeds, the BCSC established the **Cryptocurrency Intelligence Program (CIP)** to target the intersection of fiat currency and cryptocurrency. The CIP program encompasses blockchain forensic services, development of criminal targeting methodologies, technical support, and the provision of subject matter expertise to any HSI case investigating the illicit use of virtual currencies.

Since its inception in August 2009, the BCSC has initiated or substantially contributed to over 2,710 investigative leads, which have yielded 2,199 criminal arrests, 1,169 indictments, 597 state or federal convictions, and seizures of bulk cash totaling over \$1.62 billion.

HSI is also a member of the **High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Program**, which was initiated in 1990 by the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) in order to designate certain geographical areas as having especially high concentrations of drug trafficking activities such as distribution, transportation, and smuggling.

The **Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) Program** allows our special agents to partner and collaborate in investigations using our unique and far-reaching



authorities to enforce and regulate the movement of carriers, persons, and commodities between the United States and other nations. We have dedicated personnel on all eleven OCDEF co-located Strike Forces. These Strike Forces logically extend the OCDEF program beyond the creation of prosecutor-led task forces that join together on case-specific efforts and then disband at the end of the investigation. Now, permanent task force teams work together to conduct intelligence-driven, multi-jurisdictional operations against the continuum of priority targets. We also participate in the OCDEF Fusion Center, which support investigations of TCOs through interagency coordination.

**Operation Gatehouse**, an HSI initiative, was established in 2018 and offers training and targeting assistance to TCIU officers from Northern Triangle countries. TCIUs are deployed to the United States and embedded within HSI field offices to gain cultural and historical knowledge of the MS-13 transnational gang profiles, trends, and patterns of behavior, using information and events occurring in the Northern Triangle. They serve as subject matter experts and provide a direct link to Northern Triangle criminal information networks assist with the development and furtherance of HSI gang investigations.

In 2019, DOJ created **Joint Task Force (JTF)-Vulcan** with a whole-of-government approach to dismantle MS-13. JTF-Vulcan is comprised of personnel from HSI, DOJ, FBI, DEA, ATF, United States Marshals Service, and Federal Bureau of Prisons. As a result of HSI's significant contributions to JTTF-Vulcan along with its partners, the highest levels of MS-13 have been indicted on numerous charges, including federal terrorism-related charges.

HSI launched **Operation Community Shield (OCS)** in 2005 as a response to transnational gangs conducting criminal activity within the United States. OCS targets violent transnational street gangs through strategic deployment of HSI's broad law enforcement authorities. HSI partners with law enforcement agencies, both in the U.S. and abroad, to develop a comprehensive and integrated approach to fighting gangs which includes conducting complex criminal conspiracy investigations in coordination with the U.S. Attorney's offices to thwart transnational gang organizations. In FY 2021, OCS implemented four violent gang task forces within HSI Las Vegas, Nashville, Newark, and Oklahoma City. The violent gang task forces focus on investigating, disrupting, and dismantling transnational gangs and reducing violent crime in their respective areas of responsibility through cooperation with our state and local partners.

Based on HSI's participation in initiatives such as Operation Gatehouse, JTF-Vulcan and other gang enforcement operations, HSI efforts in FYs 2019-2021 have resulted in 11,921 criminal arrests, 6,975 indictments and 4,146 convictions. This includes the arrest of more than 1,000 MS-13 gang members.

Within the national security mission space, HSI special agents lead DHS's investigative counterterrorism efforts on the FBI's **Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF)** by using a broad range of criminal and administrative authorities to detect, investigate, interdict, prosecute, and remove terrorists and dismantle terrorist organizations. HSI has the ability to investigate both criminal and administrative immigration violations of law. These capabilities are what sets HSI apart from all other agencies on the JTTF as we use our exclusive authorities to quickly disrupt

and detain terrorism suspects for a wide range of violations, effectively mitigating terrorist threats and possible harm that could be caused to the American public.

Year-over-year, HSI special agents have been engaged in approximately 75 percent of terrorism-related disruptions on the JTTFs nationwide, and HSI has, on average, led approximately 40 percent of all JTTF disruptions through our exclusive authorities. In fiscal year 2020 alone, HSI special agents were engaged in more than 87 percent of terrorism-related disruptions on the JTTFs nationwide, and HSI led 45 percent of JTTF disruptions through our exclusive authorities.

In November 2010, the President of the United States issued Executive Order 13558, **Creation of Export Enforcement Coordination Center (E2C2)**. The E2C2 is a multi-agency center managed by HSI and serving as the primary forum for enforcement and intelligence agencies to coordinate, deconflict, and enhance export enforcement actions to effectively detect, prevent, disrupt, investigate, and prosecute violations of the U.S. export control laws. Executive Order 13558 specifically requires coordination of matters relating to export enforcement among the following U.S. Government entities: Department of State, Department of the Treasury, DoD, DOJ, Department of Commerce, Department of Energy, DHS, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The **Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center (IPR Center)** was created by HSI in 2010 and codified into law in the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act of 2015. The IPR Center brings together 27 domestic and international partners in a task force setting that enables the IPR Center to leverage the resources, skills, and authorities of each partner. The IPR Center stands at the forefront of the United States Government's response to combatting global intellectual property (IP) theft and enforcing international trade laws. The IPR Center is working with its many federal and industry partners to identify, interdict, and investigate individuals, companies, and criminal organizations engaging in the illegal importation of products that threaten the health and safety of the American public. The IPR Center attacks vulnerabilities in the global supply chain to further secure the border, facilitate legitimate trade, and dismantle criminal organizations engaged in illicit trade crimes.

During the pandemic, we've learned that criminals around the world who actively seek to exploit and profit from a wide range of illegal activity quickly adapt when opportunities present themselves and so we had to adapt quickly as well. In early April 2020, HSI launched **Operation Stolen Promise** to combat these increasing and evolving threats. The operation combines HSI's expertise in global trade investigations, financial fraud, and cyber investigations, along with our private and public partnerships, with the goal of disrupting and dismantling this criminal activity and strengthen global supply-chain security.

The HSI-led **Center for Countering Human Trafficking (CCHT)**, officially stood up in September 2020, is a DHS-wide effort comprised of 16 supporting offices and components. The CCHT is the first unified, intercomponent coordination center for countering human trafficking and the importation of goods produced with forced labor. The CCHT supports these investigations through programmatic and operational support; interagency and intra-agency coordination; domestic and foreign law enforcement training; and through the Blue Campaign to raise public awareness of human trafficking and to generate leads. Through the CCHT, as part of the One DHS approach, CBP and HSI coordinate and share critical Withhold Release Order

information, on the importation of goods mined, produced, or manufactured in any foreign country by convict labor and/or forced or indentured labor, that could lead to criminal investigations. HSI is committed to identifying individuals, corporations, and criminal organizations that attempt to import merchandise illegally into the United States.

While HSI's investigative portfolio is extensive and diverse, financial investigations are at the core of every investigative program area. TCOs, terrorist organizations and the myriad of criminal networks have grown increasingly more technical in their approach to concealing their criminal acts, while also morphing operations to the perceived anonymity of the darknet. Traditional money laundering methods remain, yet cryptocurrency can now be used with relative ease to facilitate any type of illicit activity. As such, since FY 2018, HSI efforts in financial investigations have resulted in nearly 8,000 criminal arrests, 5,338 indictments and 3,574 convictions.

### **Summary**

HSI's authorities and responsibilities to protect the homeland do not begin at the border or at the POEs. HSI's comprehensive strategy to conduct complex large-scale investigations represents one of DHS's best weapons for dismantling TCOs in a manner not possible solely through border interdiction efforts. HSI's international presence enhances the capacity of the host government to combat transnational organized crime and strengthens partnerships to advance HSI criminal investigations overseas. These efforts aim to protect the U.S. borders and stem illegal activity targeting the United States while still abroad. The homeland is better protected by preventing contraband and foreign adversaries from reaching our borders than attempting to detect it once it arrives.

United in our partnership with CBP at the border and POEs, as well as our efforts within the interior of the United States, HSI uses the full breadth of its authorities and expertise to pursue the investigation and attack all aspects of the organizations responsible. HSI special agents work diligently to expand their cases to complex, multi-jurisdictional investigations targeting key individuals, communications, logistics networks, and vulnerabilities within a TCO's command structure. To do this, HSI special agents use sophisticated investigative tools and techniques to collect evidence and conduct operations designed to disrupt and dismantle TCO operations and mitigate the threat they pose to the homeland. These actions occur at home and abroad, involve key U.S. and foreign law enforcement partnerships, and require significant, long-term manpower and resource commitments.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today and for your continued support of HSI and the critical investigative role it plays in investigating TCOs. HSI remains committed to its mission to secure the homeland from transnational crime and threats and to safeguard national security and public safety. I look forward to your questions.