



# Seattle

Police Department

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## MEMORANDUM

To: Councilmember Lisa Herbold, Chair  
Public Safety and Human Services Committee  
Esther Handy, Council Central Staff Director

From: Chief of Police Adrian Diaz  
Seattle Police Department

Date: February 23, 2022

Subject: SPD Report on Federal Task Forces (SLI-018-A-001)

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Pursuant to Statement of Legislative Intent SPD-018-A-001, requested in the 2022 Adopted Budget, the Seattle Police Department (SPD) has developed the attached report for review by the Public Safety and Human Services Committee.

The report below describes collaborative task force work involving local law enforcement agencies, like SPD, and federal agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), to combat violent criminal activity in our region. The overtime costs associated with these investigations is reimbursed by the federal agencies.

Each year, SPD requests budget authority for the task force-related overtime costs in the year-end supplemental budget process. By waiting until year end, SPD can better estimate how much budget authority is needed to offset the revenue-backed expenditures. Absent a budget appropriation for the reimbursable costs, SPD will have to reduce spending elsewhere to absorb the expense. The revenue will still be collected by the City unless SPD is directed to also reject the federal revenue.

As a department, we are committed to thinking critically about how we deliver police services. SPD's deployable officer count has decreased by 27% since 2019. Staffing emergency response will always be our number one priority; however, the department relies heavily on the expertise of its investigative units to bring some measure of justice to crime victims. The crimes investigated in partnership with federal agencies are not low-level crimes. The report below describes criminal networks responsible for gun violence, drug overdoses, and victimization of our most vulnerable community members.

We thank you in advance for recognizing the need for collaboration as we work to reduce violent crime and victimization in our area and continuing to support our federal partnerships and the associated funding.

cc: Brian Maxey, Chief Operating Officer  
Deanna Nollette, Assistant Chief of Investigations  
Angela Socci, Executive Director of Budget/Finance  
Jennifer Devore, City Budget Office  
Sarah Burtner, City Budget Office

## **Response to SLI-018-A-001, Report on Inter-Jurisdictional Task Forces**

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The Seattle Police Department (SPD) partners with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in a variety of capacities to collaboratively address the crime impacting Seattle communities. This collective effort maximizes efficiency and effectiveness through the sharing of resources and expertise. It also prevents unnecessary duplication of investigative efforts.

As requested in Statement of Legislative Intent (SLI) SPD-018-A-001, this report provides descriptions of the inter-jurisdictional task forces with which SPD participates, along with details of their activities in 2021. The SLI identified the following five task forces to be addressed in the report:

- (1) The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Safe Streets Task Force;
- (2) The FBI Seattle Sound Regional Violent Crime Task Force;
- (3) The FBI Homeland Security Investigations Task Force;
- (4) The US Drug Enforcement Agency Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force
- (5) The US Department of Justice Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force

It should be noted that the US Drug Enforcement Agency Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) provided supplemental federal funding for an investigative operation, which was led by the FBI Safe Streets Task Force. Therefore, the information regarding the OCDETF funded operation is captured under the FBI Safe Streets Task Force.

### **1. THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (FBI) SAFE STREETS TASK FORCE (SSTF)**

The mission of the SSTF is to identify and target for prosecution criminal enterprise groups responsible for drug trafficking, money laundering, alien smuggling, crimes of violence (e.g. murder, aggravated assault), robbery, and violent street gangs. Significant emphasis is placed on the apprehension of dangerous fugitives where a federal investigative interest is- or may be- present. This task force also conducts work centered around disrupting and dismantling Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) drug trafficking organizations by collaborating with state and federal agencies to conduct investigations. The primary focus is on violent offenders and large-level traffickers. The SSTF enhances the effectiveness of federal, state, and local law enforcement resources through a well-coordinated initiative seeking the most effective investigative and prosecutive avenues through which to convict and incarcerate dangerous offenders.

#### **SPD Personnel Assigned**

- One Gun Violence Reduction Unit (GVRU) Detective
- One Narcotics Section Detective who focuses on TOC drug trafficking organizations

#### **2021 Operations and Outcomes**

- Forty-five (45) federal indictments for Trafficking, Weapons and Money Laundering
- One hundred and fifty (150) firearm seizures
- Drug seizures:
  - Cocaine: 17 kilograms

- Methamphetamine: 4 kilograms
  - Fentanyl (pills): 60,000
  - Fentanyl (powder): 2 kilograms
  - Heroin: 1 kilogram
  - Marijuana: 700 pounds
- To date, the associated investigative operation resulted in the prosecution, conviction and sentencing of twenty individuals in federal court for drug, gun and/or conspiracy charges. The shortest resulting sentence was 6 months and the longest was 10-15 years. Additional plea agreements are expected from various leaders within the same network.

## 2. THE FBI SEATTLE SOUND REGIONAL VIOLENT CRIME TASK FORCE (SRVCTF)

**Note:** The Department identified a discrepancy between the title of the task force as reported in the supplemental budget submission (“FBI Seattle Sound Regional Violent Crime Task Force”) and the title of the task force as identified by the FBI (“Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Force”).

The Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Force is the vehicle through which all the federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies collaboratively address the violent crime plaguing communities. The FBI’s Safe Streets and Gang Unit administers 160 Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Forces nationwide. These task forces pursue violent gangs through sustained, proactive, coordinated investigations to obtain prosecutions on violations such as racketeering, drug conspiracy, and firearms violations. The Safe Streets Task Force concept expands cooperation and communication among federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, increasing productivity and avoiding duplication of investigative efforts.

### **SPD Personnel Assigned**

- Two Robbery Unit Detectives

### **2021 Operations and Outcomes**

- Conducted a three-month investigation into a group of suspects targeting pharmacies in the Pacific Northwest. 40 pharmacies in the region were robbed (32 of those robberies targeted a single company with a reported total loss of \$232,480), and 6,000 oxycodone pills were sold to Seattle area teenagers. In the commission of these robberies, suspects threatened victims with weapons, attempted to lock victims in refrigerated lockers, and eluded police. The investigation resulted in 11 arrests with charges, and the seizure of 2 long guns and 5 handguns.
- Arrested and charged 1 suspect for stealing a boat, threatening a Washington State ferry, attempting to elude Coast Guard vessels, and assaulting a federal agent.
- Arrested and charged 12 suspects for bank robberies in 2021.
- After a two-month investigation, arrested and federally indicted 1 suspect for Murder-for-Hire.
- Ongoing investigations into:
  - Six armed, take-over style dispensary robberies in Seattle.
  - Three pattern robberies at ATM locations in King County.
  - Nine pattern armed robberies (8 bank robberies and one 1 convenience store robbery) in South Seattle and King County.

### **3. THE FBI HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS TASK FORCE (HSI)**

In 2021, this task force was primarily focused on leading major public safety investigations. Two major operations targeted bad actors seeking to profit from the COVID-19 pandemic. A third major operation targeted the growing opioid crisis in the region by seeking to dismantle supply chains that fueled the proliferation of narcotics within communities.

With a renewed focus on combatting human trafficking, HSI Seattle also teamed up with SPD to build subject matter expertise, develop best practices, and establish strong methods and techniques for conducting highly sensitive and complex trafficking investigations. SPD's partnership through the Task Force Officer (TFO) program is invaluable and underscored by a cadre of high-caliber professionals.

#### **2021 Operations and Outcomes**

- HSI's High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas Task Force (HHTF) and SPD collaborated on enforcement operations that resulted in a total of 66 arrests, 63 indictments, 43 search warrants, the seizure of 24 firearms, 880,000 fentanyl pills/doses, 9 pill presses, and \$2.3 million in criminal proceeds. The suspects who were charged had criminal histories that included charges for murder, rape, and the use of a firearm in the commission of drug trafficking.
- In cooperation with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-Office of Criminal Investigation (OCI), the task force investigated a local company and its founder and president for more than a year. The suspect claimed to have developed a COVID-19 vaccine, which the company sold and administered for a fee. The investigation revealed three foreign companies, operating in the U.S., that had supplied genetic material (proteins) for the "vaccines." It also revealed evidence of hundreds of victims, including the use of live human tissue from approximately 100 individuals. The task force arrested the suspect and dismantled the operation.
- SPD, HSI, and other partners worked closely to seize approximately 2 million counterfeit N-95 respirator masks intended for hospitals, front line medical personnel and first responders since the start of FY21. The case has been accepted for federal prosecution.
- HHTF and SPD launched an initiative targeting the counterfeit pill supply chain and its intersection with violent crime in the Seattle area. The goal of the operation was to disrupt and dismantle criminal enterprises engaged in the manufacturing and distribution of synthetic opioids, fentanyl-laced and other counterfeit pharmaceuticals. The task force particularly focused on the flow of drugs and precursor chemicals into the country from China and Mexico, as well as local pill press operations, including their source of supply and distribution networks. Within the first six months, the operation has yielded 15 arrests; 17 search warrants; and 37 seizures including 24 firearms and over 880,000 fentanyl pills/doses.
- The Border Enforcement Security Taskforce (BEST) Seattle initiated a Third-Party Money laundering investigation targeting money laundering networks. The task force identified members of a conspiracy engaged in bank fraud, wire fraud and the operation of an unlicensed money service business. The operation yielded 3 criminal arrests for money laundering.
- In July 2019, BEST Financial initiated an investigation into two local individuals for fraudulent theft. From July 2019 through June 2021, BEST Financial obtained evidence that the suspects conspired to abuse one of their positions as an employee at a major e-commerce company,

devising a scheme through which they defrauded the company and its customers by altering fulfillment requests to maximize personal profits. They would sell high value merchandise and then substitute the fulfillment request with a less expensive piece of merchandise. The conspiracy was definitively linked to over \$350,000 in actual and attempted fraudulent transactions. The operation yielded 2 criminal arrests.

- Investigations revealed elderly victims were tricked by foreign call centers based in India into shipping currency to money mules to resolve fictitious outstanding criminal and tax cases. The money mules then transferred the proceeds to the criminal organization. To date, BEST Financial has intercepted over \$300,000 in victim proceeds and obtained 2 Federal indictments for mail fraud. As of late 2021, investigators are processing data obtained from a Gmail search warrant for 12 e-mail accounts associated with the owners and operators of the Indian call center. It is anticipated that additional indictments will result.
- An SPD Task Force Officer (TFO) has been instrumental in helping establish the Human Trafficking Group with HSI Seattle. They have conducted 22 trainings, sometimes alongside other presenters. The audience to whom they present includes law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, social service providers, health care professionals, and community members, among other groups. Since January 2021, they have worked 16 new investigations.

#### **4. THE US DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION TASK FORCE (HIGH INTENSITY DRUG TRAFFICKING AREAS - HIDTA)**

The HIDTA Program goals are as follows:

- Disrupt the market for illegal drugs by dismantling or disrupting drug trafficking and money laundering organizations; and
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of HIDTA initiatives
- Provide funding to assist adult felony drug court programs, prevention and public education programs operating in 10 HIDTA counties
- Purchase substance use disorder treatment services, mental health and trauma treatment services, medical and dental care, housing, educational programs, vocational training, childcare, and transportation for program participants
- Support judicially supervised treatment programs available to offenders who have been arrested for low-level drug or drug-related crimes

This task force is comprised of three groups (D21, D22, and D23), each with a different focus.

**DEA Task Force Group D21** disrupts illicit drug trafficking in the Seattle area by immobilizing targeted violators and trafficking organizations. They gather and report intelligence data relating to trafficking in narcotics and dangerous drugs and conduct undercover operations and traditional investigations.

##### **SPD Personnel Assigned**

- One Narcotics Section Detective

##### **2021 Outcomes**

- Fifty-three (53) arrests

- Fourteen (14) cases initiated
- One hundred (100) weapons seizures
- Drug seizures:
  - Cocaine: 19.82 kilograms
  - Fentanyl: 69.73 kilograms
  - Heroin: 33.45 kilograms
  - Methamphetamine: 39.38 kilograms

**DEA Task Force Group D22** is the SeaTac International Airport interdiction group; they are responsible for investigations that occur at SeaTac International Airport. The primary focus of the HIDTA group D22 is to target, disrupt, and dismantle drug trafficking and money laundering organizations, reduce the illegal drug supply in the United States, and bring criminals to justice.

**SPD Personnel Assigned**

- One Narcotics Section Detective who has the auxiliary duty as a Narcotics canine handler for the task force

**2021 Outcomes**

- Drug seizures:
  - Fentanyl: 21.7 kilograms
  - Heroin: 19.2 kilograms
  - Methamphetamine: 55.9 kilograms
  - Cocaine: 2.6 kilograms

**DEA Task Force Group D-23** currently focuses on Fentanyl related investigations, to include enforcement, as well as Fentanyl related overdose death investigations. The task force was formed beginning in Federal Fiscal Year 2022 (October 2021).

**SPD Personnel Assigned**

- One Narcotics Section Detective

**2021 Outcomes**

- Two arrests
- Drug seizures:
  - Fentanyl: 30,000 pills
  - Heroin: 2 kilograms
  - Methamphetamine: 6 kilograms
  - Cocaine: 1 kilogram