

**Remarks by DEA Acting Administrator Tim Shea
at a Press Conference in
Tallahassee, Florida - October 6, 2020**

Remarks as prepared for delivery

In 2019 alone, Mexican cartels shipped hundreds of thousands of pounds of methamphetamine in tractor trailers and personal vehicles across our Southwest border and onto our nation's highways — then headed straight for our cities and towns across America.

One of those towns was Tallahassee, Florida. Unfortunately, Franklin County, in particular, had been identified in the last few years as an area in North Florida that was experiencing a serious problem with meth.

So the DEA partnered with the Franklin County Sheriff's Office and quickly identified several mid-level methamphetamine distributors operating nearby.

That joint investigation discovered a drug trafficker in Panama City, Florida, who was then charged in federal court.

Sure enough, he was getting his drug supply from a drug trafficking organization in Atlanta with direct ties to a Mexican cartel.

The Atlanta organization — 14 different defendants comprised of dealers, couriers, and money launderers — was getting methamphetamines from Mexico, and then transporting 20 to 25 kilos of meth a week to North Florida.

But not anymore. The good news is that not only have the mid-level distributors here in Franklin County been arrested, but, — with the help of the Bay County Sheriff's Office — so has the trafficker in Panama City.

And the entire Atlanta drug trafficking organization has been taken out as well, as part of our recent Operation Crystal Shield.

Over the last six months, DEA has led more than 750 very successful investigations in key cities across the United States as part of Operation Crystal Shield — and I'm glad to say Atlanta was one of them.

Operation Crystal Shield targeted the transportation hubs used by Mexican cartels to flood our communities with fentanyl, methamphetamine, and other deadly drugs.

But we are not stopping there.

Ultimately, our strategy is to attack drug trafficking at the source — Mexico.

Virtually all of the methamphetamine and much of the fentanyl consumed in this country comes from Mexico.

These drugs are manufactured on an industrial scale in Mexico using precursor chemicals produced in China, and then smuggled across the border where they are distributed to every state in the country.

That is why my first foreign trip as Administrator — just concluded last week — was to Mexico to meet with government officials there to strengthen our efforts to attack this threat at the source — to take on the cartels head on.

The large number of seizures and arrests we've seen as part of Crystal Shield have dealt a significant blow to the Mexican cartels and the violent street gangs that seek to prey on innocent Americans in towns like Tallahassee.

That's why our partnership with state and local law enforcement is so crucial.

We salute Franklin County Sheriff Tony Smith and his team for their great work; as well as my good friend and Florida's Attorney General Ashley Moody;

Lawrence Keefe, our US Attorney for the Northern District of Florida; and the many community leaders at the local level who are partnering with us to stop the epidemic of addiction in this country.

Together, we built a highly effective team to drive down the threat from deadly methamphetamine and associated drug violence in our neighborhoods.

In particular, I'd like to honor DEA Special Agent Justin Duralia, who first partnered with Sheriff Smith's office and began to build a strategy for dismantling the local organization.

He developed good working relationships with our various law enforcement partner agencies and task force officers.

This was key to his successful investigation.

Special Agent Duralia knows how to do the hard work and organize a good case that will result in a conviction.

He's a tremendous asset to our DEA family, and I hear that he's also a very nice guy. ((I don't envy DEA Task Force Officer Dan Roufa, who is his replacement. He's got big shoes to fill.))

I'd also like to salute Assistant US Attorney James McCain, who brought the charges against the dealer in Panama City, which led to that dealer cooperating and leading us to six more members of his drug trafficking organization.

All of those drug dealers are now under arrest and facing stiff prison sentences when they are convicted.

All told, James was responsible for 15 federal prosecutions, as he pressed to bring those who operated this drug organization to justice.

The ripple effect is still being felt in this community.

And finally, there's Assistant U.S. Attorney Eric Mountin, who is the Deputy Chief of the Criminal Division for the US Attorney's office here.

Eric was responsible for working with James McCain and helping to identify the worst of the worst offenders in this district, making sure they were successfully prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

He's learned the unique geography and population of Northern Florida and knows how to work in close partnership with local and state law enforcement to make sure that federal resources are available.

Eric knows that what works in one town may not work in another, and that meth can destroy small communities quickly. And he effectively used our strong federal laws to bring these drug dealers to justice.

Thanks to both of you for a job well done.

I had the privilege of meeting earlier for a roundtable discussion with the team on the ground here, including our state and local task force partners.

We discussed the problems facing the panhandle and northern Florida.

We at DEA are committed to working with our state and local partners on these important investigations that impact the lives of those addicted to drugs and their families as well as every citizen caught in the crossfire of violence fueled by drug trafficking.

Those who say drug trafficking is not a violent crime couldn't be more wrong.

Drug trafficking directly affects the safety and security of all of us.

The criminals who engage in drug trafficking fuel the epidemic of addiction in our country — and profit from it — while feeding the violence that is plaguing so many of our communities.

That's why DEA is committed to working with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners — every day — to disrupt, dismantle, and destroy the most violent drug trafficking organizations.

To our honorees today, and to all of our partners on the ground...thank you for making our communities a better place to live — for every American.

And now I'd like to turn the mic over to U.S. Attorney Keefe.

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