

**DEA Acting Administrator Timothy Shea**  
**Remarks at Project Safeguard Press Conference**  
**Tuesday, October 20, 2020**

*(Remarks as prepared for delivery)*

Thank you, SAC Boyle and Nate.

Today we are announcing some preliminary results of our nationwide violent crime initiative, called Project Safeguard, and specifically, the results of DEA operations here in New England.

It's great news for the people of New Bedford and Fall River, and for the people who live in other great American cities.

It's been well documented that many of our major cities have seen an increase in violence fueled in part by drug trafficking. In fact, violent crime rates in many of these cities greatly exceed the national average.

Southeastern Massachusetts is no exception: according to FBI data, the New Bedford and Fall River area has violent crime rates that are unacceptably high.

And the story is the same in other areas across the country — including Detroit, Los Angeles, and Kansas City — that I have visited in the last few months. According to FBI crime data, for the first six months of 2020, the number of murders in Detroit have increased by nearly 19 percent, while the number of murders in Kansas City has risen by almost 32 percent when compared to the first six months of 2019.

I was in Los Angeles last week and, the violent crime rate there was nearly double the national average in 2019.

In addition, preliminary numbers from the Los Angeles Police Department show a 23 percent increase in the number of murders year-to-date in 2020, compared to the same period last year.

Violent crime and drug trafficking are inextricably linked. In fact, more than half of defendants convicted of firearms charges have also been convicted of drug trafficking.

Simply put, illegal drugs and illegal guns go hand in hand.

It's no coincidence that when we announce massive drug seizures, the seizures often include large caches of firearms as well.

The connection between drug trafficking and firearms is so well-settled that courts have repeatedly held that for drug traffickers, guns and other weapons are "tools of the trade."

One is almost always found with the other.

That's because drug trafficking organizations use the threat of violence to force loyalty to their leaders ... to silence their competition ... to expand their drug markets ... and to settle their disputes.

The problem is that they commit these violent acts in the midst of our neighborhoods, on the streets where Americans live ... and work ... and raise their children.

In some neighborhoods, the bullets are flying at all hours.

Violent drug trafficking organizations are a threat to the safety of every American.

And every American deserves to be free from the fear of violent crime.

Today we have some good news on this front.

In just two months, as part of our new violent crime initiative, called Project Safeguard, DEA has arrested over 1500 violent drug traffickers, including 40 dangerous fugitives ... seized more than 6,100 kilograms of illicit drugs; confiscated 2,130 weapons; and taken nearly \$24 million dollars in profits from the drug cartels.

Our operations targeted dozens of violent street gangs and drug trafficking organizations, and led to the seizure of huge stashes of methamphetamine, fentanyl, and opioids — and also resulted in the stunning seizure of over 30,000 rounds of ammunition, pipe bombs, and other explosives.

We're also announcing today that in the last six months, DEA has tracked down and arrested several extremely violent, armed, and dangerous fugitives in major metropolitan areas including Atlanta, Los Angeles, and even right here in Boston.

These individuals were indicted for everything from robbing pharmacies and setting up meth labs ... to overseeing meth, crack cocaine, and heroin distribution rings.

With these violent criminals off the streets and set to face justice, these cities are already safer today.

Major drug trafficking organizations rely on local traffickers and street gangs to expand their territory and customers, leaving a trail of death and despair in their wake.

A shocking 33,000 gangs are operating right now on the streets of America, and they play a major role in not only distributing drugs, but also in committing violent crimes.

Law-abiding Americans want the violence to stop. They want to see an end to the epidemic of drug overdoses. And they want us to shut down these organizations.

That's where Project Safeguard comes in. As part of this new initiative to reduce violent crime, we're attacking these violent drug trafficking organizations in three important ways.

First, DEA is prioritizing our ongoing investigations into drug trafficking organizations known for their violence and brutality.

Our offices are working with state and local law enforcement partners around the country to advance these high-priority cases and successfully prosecute the criminals who are terrorizing American communities.

Second, in the course of our drug trafficking investigations, DEA agents routinely encounter firearms and other dangerous weapons.

When we take down drug trafficking organizations, our agents seize large stashes of drugs and firearms.

And so DEA will share intelligence with ATF and our state and local partners to shut down illegal firearms suppliers.

Together, we will trace firearms seized in DEA investigations, and then prosecute significant gun traffickers also involved in the drug trade.

Third, DEA enhanced our partnership with the U.S. Marshals Service to target the most-wanted DEA fugitives and prioritize their capture.

We need to get violent fugitives off the streets, and remove them from the ranks of these drug-trafficking gangs.

We did exactly that here in Boston, where we arrested three very dangerous fugitives as part of this operation.

We know for a fact that drug traffickers have longer criminal records than other offenders.

Nearly three-quarters of federal drug offenders have at least one prior criminal conviction — and often many more — when they arrive at prison.

And we know that when drug traffickers are released from prison, they are more likely than other offenders to go right back to a life of crime.

We need to stop the revolving door of violent drug offenders committing more and more crimes.

Working side-by-side with our law enforcement partners, we can leverage our unique capabilities and expertise to sever the unholy alliance between Mexican drug cartels and drug trafficking organizations in the United States.

Our coalition brings an innovative approach, collaborative energy, and renewed commitment to destroying the violent cartels that smuggle drugs across our borders ... and the criminal enterprises that spread this poison throughout our communities.

Not all violent crimes involve weapons.

More than 70,000 Americans die every year of a drug overdose, and DEA is committed to treating these cases as homicides, where appropriate, and holding drug traffickers accountable for these heinous crimes.

DEA will continue to work tirelessly with prosecutors to achieve justice for families, communities, and victims by advancing cases involving death from drug overdoses.

DEA's mission has been — and always will be — to disrupt, dismantle and destroy the drug trafficking organizations that spread violence and death across America.

DEA, along with our law enforcement partners, is committed to safeguarding the health and safety of our communities, and to keeping all Americans safe from the scourge of drugs and its accompanying violence.

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