



Pinal County Sheriff's Office

Mark Lamb
Sheriff

To: DPS Border Strike Force Funding Department

**From: Matthew Thomas, Chief Deputy
Pinal County Sheriff's Office**

MT #500

Re: Local Border Support funding SB 1720

Date: October 4, 2023

The Pinal County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) manages a HIDTA Initiative Task Force (PCNTF), which targets, disrupts and dismantles individuals, groups and criminal organizations involved in the manufacture, processing, transport and sales of illegal drugs that are directly connected to the U.S./Mexico border. Pinal County has experienced an enormous increase in the smuggling of illegal drugs, specifically fentanyl and methamphetamine, into and through Pinal County. PCSO allots a significant number of resources to target the interstate trafficking of bulk loads of illegal drugs, and street level sales of drugs that have been smuggled into the US via Mexico by the Transnational Criminal Organizations based in Mexico. PCSO has established within this task force model, criminal interdiction units, both overt and covert, who partner with the local Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) group out of Casa Grande and Phoenix in the efforts to identify, disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations (DTO) operating in and through our county. These same groups also aggressively attack sales, manufacture and transportation of street level illegal drugs, targeting local DTOs.

PCSO uses a proven approach of education, prevention, and vigorous enforcement – including thorough investigations and well-prepared case documentation to allow for prosecutors to ensure these criminals and criminal organizations face conviction and loss of appropriate assets. As with any HIDTA initiative, PCSO accomplishes this mission through a continuous spirit of cooperation, unity, and partnerships developed with federal, state, local and tribal partners. We also focus on a strategy that promotes collaborative, intelligence-led, unbiased policing in coordinated and mutually supportive multi-jurisdictional law enforcement efforts of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA).

With recent legislative changes, the ability to seize assets from criminals and criminal organizations, primarily the Mexican drug cartels, directly involved in the manufacture, transport and sales of illegal drugs, which directly impact the Mexican drug cartels, has been dramatically reduced. This in turn has emboldened and empowered the Mexican drug cartels to further their criminal enterprises.

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Pinal County has seen a noticeable reduction in asset forfeiture over the past year, which is directly related to these recent legislative rulings. PCNTF overtime, equipment, vehicles, and training have historically received funding from the Pinal County ARRF. PCSO is the managing partner in the Pinal County Narcotics Task Force, and as such has assumed/absorbed much of the financial responsibility and costs associated with maintaining and operating PCNTF.

The Pinal County Sheriff's Office is requesting funding support relating to SB 1720 to offset the financial burden on our agency. The Local Border Support funding will directly support the Anti-Smuggling Unit (ASU), the Pinal County Narcotics Task Force (PCNTF), and our Gang and Habitual Offender Strike Team (GHOST) unit. This funding request would provide funding for four (4) PCSO employees assigned to our Anti-Smuggling Unit (ASU), equaling \$556k for salaries and employee related expenses. Additionally, PCSO will be purchasing equipment valued at or above \$5k to be used by ASU, PCNTF and/or GHOST, all of which work in direct support of PCSO targeting and prosecuting those involved in illegal drug manufacture, transport or sales. The equipment to be purchased is as follows: Valorence Covert Surveillance system (stationary) \$22k, Valorence Dual Purpose Modular (Mobile) Camera System \$18k, Three (4) Thermal Binoculars \$18k, Five (5) Night Vision goggles w/mounts \$85k, Four (4) Off Highway Vehicles (OHV's) w/ police radios and emergency lighting upfitting \$250k, Two (2) flatbed trailers (for OHV's) \$10k, and lastly one surveillance vehicle, a Chevrolet Traverse w/ police radio and emergency lighting upfitting \$41k, for a total of \$1 million in personnel and equipment.

We are seeing record numbers related to illegal drug smuggling/trafficking, manufacture and sales, as well as deaths associated with the use of these drugs. The requested funding support will relieve an incredible financial burden on the law enforcement agencies and prosecutor's office in Pinal County. This funding will also ensure the ability of PCSO to continue to proactively address these issues.

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