

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3203

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Regina LaBelle  
Acting Director  
U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy  
1800 G St NW, Washington, DC 20006

Dear Acting Director LaBelle,

I write today in strong support of the application submitted by Sullivan County, New York, to the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy to become a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). Given that Sullivan County has the highest per capita fatal opioid overdose rate in all of New York State, its law enforcement agencies would greatly benefit from this designation and the HIDTA program's collaborative approach to drug-control among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies.

Sullivan County should be included in the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area of New York and New Jersey (NY/NJ HIDTA) for a number of reasons. First, Sullivan County is a significant center of illegal drug importation and distribution with its age-adjusted fatal opioid overdose rate 162% higher than the average rate of all other New York counties. Additionally, according to 2017 New York State Department of Health data, Sullivan County had the highest crude opioid overdose rates in the entire state. Importantly, all other available data indicates that Sullivan County is disproportionately burdened by opiate use disorder and overdose-related mortality per capita. Sullivan County and its major transportation routes, including Route 17, also have a well-documented history of drug-related arrests. However, despite these alarming statistics, Sullivan County is the only county in the entire Hudson Valley region without a HIDTA designation.

Importantly, Sullivan County's law enforcement agencies, including the Sullivan County District Attorney's Office and the Sullivan County Opioid Epidemic Task Force, have committed significant resources to respond to the drug trafficking problem throughout Sullivan County and the entire region. New York's Division of Criminal Justice Services data shows that, in 2019, 27% of all misdemeanor and felony level arrests in Sullivan County were for drug-related offenses. Thus, Sullivan County's law enforcement agencies are dedicating a significant portion of their time and resources to drug investigations. Furthermore, drug-related activities in Sullivan County are having a significant harmful impact on the area. Apart from having the highest per capita fatal drug overdose rate in New York, Sullivan County emergency response personnel are administering emergency naloxone more frequently than ever before and Sullivan's drug-related hospitalizations per 100,000 are 68% higher than the New York State's average.

For these reasons, and many more, a significant increase in the allocation of federal resources is needed to adequately respond to drug-related activities in Sullivan County. This is why I am asking that the United States Office of National Drug Control Policy include Sullivan County in the New York/Jersey High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. The HIDTA program's collaborative approach to drug-control among local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies will greatly benefit Sullivan County and New York State residents. At a time when opioid overdoses have skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, I thank you for considering this important request. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Charles Schumer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles E. Schumer  
United States Senator