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FROM CARTELS TO COASTLINES: AN EXAMINATION OF U.S. FEDERAL EFFORTS TO CONFRONT ILLICIT MARITIME ACTIVITIES IN U.S. WATERS

JOINT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND MARITIME SECURITY

AND THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER SECURITY AND ENFORCEMENT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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FROM CARTELS TO COASTLINES: AN EXAMINATION OF U.S. FEDERAL EFFORTS TO CONFRONT ILLICIT MARITIME ACTIVITIES IN U.S. WATERS

Tuesday, June 10, 2025

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
AND MARITIME SECURITY, AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON BORDER SECURITY AND ENFORCEMENT,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittees met, pursuant to notice, at 10:05 a.m., in room 360, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Carlos Gimenez [Chairman of the subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security] presiding.

Present from the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security: Representatives Gimenez, Crane, Biggs, McIver, Kennedy, and Carter.

Present from the Subcommittee on Border Security and Enforcement: Representatives Guest, Crane, Biggs, Correa, Ramirez, and Johnson.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, and Subcommittee on Border Security and Enforcement will come to order. Without objection, the Chair may declare the committee in recess at any point.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine the evolving tactics, geographic patterns, and operational strategies employed by transnational criminal organizations, including Mexican cartels, to exploit U.S. maritime borders for drug smuggling, human trafficking, weapons trafficking, and other illegal activities. We will also evaluate the Department of Homeland Security's interagency efforts, operational posture, and resource allocations for maritime interdiction, with particular emphasis on the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Maritime Operations, and Homeland Security Investigations.

I would like to thank our colleagues from the Border Security Enforcement Subcommittee for partnering with us on this joint hearing, and I recognize myself for an opening statement.

Good morning. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I especially want to thank Chairman Guest and the Subcommittee on Border Security and Enforcement for working with us to hold this joint hearing on a matter of growing importance and security

for the American homeland. Transnational criminal organizations, or TCOs, remain agile and persistent adversaries. For years, these groups have exploited vulnerabilities at our Southern Border, our southern land border, where drug smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal immigration surged to historic levels under the Biden administration. Since the beginning of 2025, however, public data suggests a notable decline in many of these illegal flows. That progress is due in large part to the renewed focus and decisive actions being taken under the current Trump administration to restore control and enforce our laws.

But as we improve security on land, we must not allow our maritime domain to become the next weak point. Increasingly, criminal networks are turning to the sea, where vast distances, patchwork jurisdictions, and limited real-time visibility offer TCOs a lower risk of detection and a high reward for moving contraband. Though maritime routes account for a smaller share of illegal migration and narcotics trafficking compared to land routes, the threat remains serious. TCOs and other criminal actors are leveraging everything from go-fast boats, fishing vessels, and narco submarines to container ships and commercial cargo fleets to move cocaine, synthetic drugs, weapons, and human cargo into the United States. The first half of this fiscal year alone, the U.S. Coast Guard has already seized and offloaded more cocaine than it did in all of fiscal year 2024, a clear indicator that illicit maritime activity remains a persistent challenge despite improved enforcement efforts.

The scale and sophistication of these operations require an equally coordinated and capable response. As a representative of the Florida Keys and much of South Florida, I know first-hand how vulnerable our maritime borders can be. From the Caribbean to the Straits of Florida and up to the Atlantic coast, our region has long been a strategic target for smugglers and cartels seeking to enter the United States undetected. The threat to our ports, shipping routes, and coastal areas is not theoretical. It directly affects the day-to-day security and economic viability and stability of South Florida.

Moreover, while most fentanyl still enters the United States through land ports of entry, we cannot ignore the possibility that maritime routes are being used to transport precursor chemicals or synthetic opioids manufactured abroad. This is particularly concerning given the well-documented role that entities based in the People's Republic of China continue to play in supplying the chemical building blocks used to manufacture fentanyl in Mexico. These synthetic opioids are then trafficked into American communities, often with devastating results. Tens of thousands of Americans are dying each year from fentanyl.

Beijing is complicit in incentivizing the distribution of these chemicals world-wide, which is responsible for the crisis that now claims the lives of tens of thousands of Americans each year. It is unknown what role, if any, the Mexican government has had in this crisis as they have failed to stop the flow of these deadly chemicals into the United States.

To its credit, the Trump administration has made maritime security a greater priority by investing in interdiction efforts, revitalizing partnerships with key regional allies, and applying needed

pressure on adversarial regimes that threaten the safety of the Western Hemisphere. These steps mark a welcome shift in our posture. But as this hearing will show, we must do more. We need a comprehensive maritime security strategy that includes enhanced detection capabilities, more robust interagency coordination, and expanded use of advanced technology to monitor, interdict, and deter illicit maritime activity. Today's hearing is an opportunity to access how Federal agencies are responding to these evolving maritime threats. We will hear from those on the front lines about what is working, where the challenges remain, and what resources or authorities may be needed to close remaining gaps.

Thank you again to our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your insights and a productive discussion of how we can better protect our coasts, our communities, and our country from illicit activity at sea.

[The statement of Chairman Gimenez follows:]

STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN CARLOS A. GIMENEZ

JUNE 10, 2025

Good morning. I want to thank everyone for being here today. I especially want to thank Chairman Guest and the Subcommittee on Border Security and Enforcement for working with us to hold this joint hearing on a matter of growing importance to the security of the American homeland.

Transnational criminal organizations, or TCOs, remain agile and persistent adversaries. For years, these groups have exploited vulnerabilities at our southern land border, where drug smuggling, human trafficking, and illegal immigration surged to historic levels under the Biden administration.

Since the beginning of 2025, however, public data suggests a notable decline in many of these illegal flows. That progress is due, in large part, to the renewed focus and decisive action being taken under the current Trump administration to restore control and enforce our laws.

But as we improve security on land, we must not allow our maritime domain to become the next weak point. Increasingly, criminal networks are turning to the sea, where vast distances, patchwork jurisdictions, and limited real-time visibility offer TCOs a lower risk of detection and a high reward for moving contraband.

Although maritime routes account for a smaller share of illegal migration and narcotics trafficking compared to land routes, the threat remains serious. TCOs and other criminal actors are leveraging everything from go-fast boats, fishing vessels, and narco-submarines to container ships and commercial cargo fleets to move cocaine, synthetic drugs, weapons, and human cargo into the United States.

In the first half of this fiscal year alone, the U.S. Coast Guard has already seized and offloaded more cocaine than it did in all of fiscal year 2024, a clear indicator that illicit maritime activity remains a persistent challenge despite improved enforcement efforts. The scale and sophistication of these operations require an equally coordinated and capable response.

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Moreover, while most fentanyl still enters the United States through land ports of entry, we cannot ignore the possibility that maritime routes are being used to transport precursor chemicals or synthetic opioids manufactured abroad. This is particularly concerning given the well-documented role that entities based in the People's Republic of China continue to play in supplying the chemical building blocks used to manufacture fentanyl in Mexico. These synthetic opioids are then trafficked into American communities, often with devastating consequences.

Whether through negligence or indifference, Beijing has failed to stop the flow of these chemicals, contributing to a crisis that now claims the lives of tens of thousands of Americans each year.

To its credit, the Trump administration has made maritime security a greater priority by investing in interdiction efforts, revitalizing partnerships with key regional allies, and applying needed pressure on adversarial regimes that threaten the safety of the Western Hemisphere. These steps mark a welcome shift in our posture. But as this hearing will show, more must be done.

We need a comprehensive maritime security strategy that includes enhanced detection capabilities, more robust interagency coordination, and expanded use of advanced technology to monitor, interdict, and deter illicit maritime activity.

Today's hearing is an opportunity to assess how our Federal agencies are responding to these evolving maritime threats. We will hear from those on the front lines about what is working, where the challenges remain, and what resources or authorities may be needed to close remaining gaps.

Thank you again to our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to your insights and to a productive discussion on how we can better protect our coasts, our communities, and our country from illicit activity at sea.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I recognize the Ranking Member, the gentlewoman from New Jersey, Mrs. McIver, for her opening statements.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you so much, Chairman. Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. Good morning to everyone.

Today's hearing provides an opportunity to discuss how Trump's reckless orders are undermining homeland security and making our communities less safe. Over the weekend, we saw Trump Federalize the National Guard to respond to protests in Los Angeles and threaten to deploy Marines on U.S. soil against Americans. Trump is using every possible excuse to escalate the situation and manufacture unnecessary confrontations.

In January, Trump and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem ordered the Coast Guard to triple its presence at U.S. borders in an attempt to carry out their reckless immigration policy. This redirection of troops to the border comes at great cost to the Coast Guard's other critical missions. At a time when levels of maritime migration are already down due to this administration's essential ending asylum in the United States, the Coast Guard is pulling assets and personnel from around the globe to sit at the U.S. border. Critically, the Coast Guard has redirected deployments from Indo-Pacific and Arctic regions, from Congress has invested heavily on a bipartisan basis in the Coast Guard's capacity to counter aggression from China and Russia. Reducing our activities in the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic undermines our long-term strategic interests and ultimately makes us less safe.

Worse yet, the Trump administration is diverting the Coast Guard's limited aviation fleet to assist with deportations. The Coast Guard is flying immigrants internally within the United States to relocate them to staging areas for deportation. This is not the Coast Guard's mission. I repeat again, this is not the Coast Guard's mission. These flights place major strain on our Coast Guard aviation fleet, which already struggles to meet the service's needs. Many Coast Guard aircrafts are from the 1980's and 1990's and suffer major maintenance and reliability issues. Instead of replacing the oldest planes and helicopters in the fleet, Secretary Noem is looking to acquire a new $50 million Gulfstream jet to replace 1 of 2 she already has available for her use. Coast Guard aircraft were already available for the service to use less than 70 percent of the time before accounting for the new demands this administration is making.

These planes and helicopters are essential to the Coast Guard's mission from search and rescue to drug and migrant interdictions.

Operating flights in service of other agencies' missions is the last thing the Coast Guard needs. Of course, the Coast Guard is not the only agency diverting resources to deportations above all else. The list of agencies reportedly taking personnel away from their primary mission to focus on deportation goes on and on, from Customs and Border Protections; Homeland Security Investigations; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; the U.S. Marshals Service; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives; the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service; and the Internal Revenue Service. These agencies are all pulling resources from their missions to help deport immigrants, the vast and vast majority who are nonviolent contributing members of our communities.

When it comes to undocumented immigrants, it does not matter if they are elderly grandparents, sick children, or Cubans, Haitians, or Venezuelans seeking refuge from violence. Trump's orders are to try to deport them all, no matter the law and no matter the cost. Is this really what the American people want? I have my doubts for sure.

To those watching this hearing, I ask you, are you hoping the Government will find and save you if you are stranded on a roof during a hurricane season? I think you do. But sorry, under Trump, the Coast Guard plane that would otherwise help might be busy flying law-abiding immigrants away from their communities.

Are you hoping the Government will investigate wealthy tax cheats and make them pay their fair share? I am sure you hope so. But sorry, under Trump, many of the agents who are supposed to do that are busy deporting local farmers, construction workers, community leaders, and caregivers.

Are you hoping Federal agents will investigate and stop the worst of the worst, drug traffickers, armed smugglers, human traffickers, and even child abusers? I am sure you do. But sorry, under Trump, many of the agents who are supposed to do that are busy deporting your friends and your neighbors. Those are apparently the Federal Government's priorities with Trump and Republicans in charge.

I want to thank our witnesses again for being here and I look forward to today's discussion. With that, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member McIver follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER LAMONICA MCIVER

JUNE 10, 2025

Today's hearing provides an opportunity to discuss how President Trump's reckless orders are undermining homeland security and making our communities less safe. Over the weekend, we saw President Trump nationalize the National Guard to respond to protests in Los Angeles and threaten to deploy Marines on U.S. soil. Trump is using every possible excuse to inflame the situation and manufacture unnecessary confrontations.

In January, President Trump and Secretary Noem ordered the Coast Guard to triple its presence at U.S. borders. This surge comes at great cost to the Coast Guard's other critical missions.

At a time when levels of maritime migration are already down due to this administration effectively ending asylum in the United States, the Coast Guard is pulling assets and personnel from around the globe to sit at the U.S. border. Critically, the Coast Guard has redirected deployments from the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic—re-

gions where Congress has invested heavily on a bipartisan basis in the Coast Guard's capacity to counter aggression from China and Russia.

Reducing our activities in the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic undermines our long-term strategic interests and ultimately makes us less safe. Worse yet, the Trump administration is diverting the Coast Guard's limited aviation fleet to assist with deportations. The Coast Guard is flying immigrants internally within the United States to relocate them to staging areas for deportation. This is not the Coast Guard's mission.

These flights place major strain on the Coast Guard aviation fleet, which already struggles to meet the service's needs. Many Coast Guard aircraft are from the 80's and 90's and suffer major maintenance and reliability issues. Instead of replacing the oldest planes and helicopters in the fleet, Secretary Noem is looking to acquire a new $50 million dollar Gulfstream jet to replace 1 of the 2 she already has available for her use.

Coast Guard aircraft were already available for the service to use less than 70 percent of the time before accounting for the new demands this administration is making. These planes and helicopters are essential to the Coast Guard's missions, from search and rescue to drug and migrant interdictions. Operating flights in service of other agencies' missions is the last thing the Coast Guard needs.

Of course, the Coast Guard is not the only agency diverting resources to deportations above all else.

The list of agencies reportedly diverting personnel away from their primary mission to support deportations goes on and on:

- Customs and Border Protection
- Homeland Security Investigations
- The Federal Bureau of Investigation
- The U.S. Marshals Service
- The Drug Enforcement Administration
- The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
- The State Department's Diplomatic Security Service
- The Internal Revenue Service.

These agencies are all pulling resources from their missions to help deport immigrants—the vast, vast majority of whom are non-violent, contributing members of our communities. When it comes to undocumented immigrants, it does not matter if they are elderly grandparents, sick children, or Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, or Venezuelans seeking refuge from violence. President Trump's orders are to try to deport them all, no matter the law and no matter the cost.

Is this really what the American people want? I have my doubts. To those watching this hearing, I ask:

Are you hoping the Government will find and save you if you are stranded on a roof during hurricane season?

Sorry—under President Trump, the Coast Guard plane that would otherwise help just might be tied up with flying law-abiding immigrants away from their communities.

Are you hoping the Government will investigate wealthy tax cheats and make them pay their fair share?

Sorry—under President Trump, many of the agents who are supposed to do that are busy deporting your local farmers, construction workers, cleaners, and cooks.

Are you hoping Federal agents will investigate and stop the worst of the worst drug traffickers, arms smugglers, human traffickers, and child abusers?

Sorry—under President Trump, many of the agents who are supposed to do that are busy deporting your friends and neighbors.

Those are apparently the Federal Government's priorities with President Trump and Republicans in charge.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to Ranking Member McIver.

I now recognize the Chairman for the Subcommittee on Border Security Enforcement, the gentleman from Mississippi, Mr. Guest, for his opening statement.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to start by responding to the opening statement of Mrs. McIver. I want the record of this committee to be crystal clear that I and my fellow Republicans, that we strongly condemn the senseless violence and lawlessness that we have watched unfold in California since last week. I want to commend the brave men and women of our State, Federal, and local law enforcement, as well as our National

Guardsmen and our United States Marines who have stepped up at a moment's notice to restore order and to protect America from chaos while we reaffirm the rule of law. It is a sad state of affairs when simply enforcing longstanding immigration law is used to justify violent riots. Even more sad that the far left is standing not with law enforcement, but with rioters and with illegal aliens.

Today's hearing provides an opportunity to examine the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to deter, detect, and disrupt illicit maritime activities that have threatened our national security and have undermined the rule of law. I want to thank each of our witnesses for appearing today. Your expertise in your field is vital as we examine the challenges and as we seek to find solutions in securing America's vast maritime domain.

From the Gulf of America to the shores of Alaska, the United States' maritime border spans thousands of miles of coastland. It is comprised of waterways, shipping routes, and ports that facilitate commerce and play a vital role in our national security defense. While our national maritime geography is a strength, it also presents challenges. The Caribbean and Pacific regions in particular have become prime targets for cartels and criminal organizations. They use fast boats, fishing vessels, semi-submersibles to evade detection while moving narcotics, weapons, and human cargo into the United States.

While President Trump has strengthened security along our land border, achieving a remarkable 95 percent decrease in daily border encounters within the administration's first hundred days, we must continue to remain vigilant to the fact that cartels are agile, they are adaptive. As enforcement strengthens on land, these criminal networks are shifting their operations to the sea. To counter these threats, the Department of Homeland Security employs a whole-of-Government approach, incorporating its Federal law enforcement partners on joint maritime border security operations. Each of the components with us today play a critical role in that effort.

The Coast Guard is our Nation's oldest continuous seagoing service and is a cornerstone of maritime border security. With a unique blend of military, law enforcement, regulatory, and humanitarian roles, the United States Coast Guard is often the first and only presence in remote maritime areas. It interdicts vessels far from the United States' shore, often before threats reach the homeland, and seize hundreds of thousands of pounds of illicit drugs each year.

CBP's Air and Marine Operations is the Nation's only Federal agency dedicated to aviation and marine law enforcement. With a fleet of high-speed interceptors, coastal patrol vessels, fixed-wing surveillance aircraft, and unmanned aerial systems, AMO conducts complex interdiction missions across the air and sea. Its mission is to safeguard the American people and AMO is on the front lines of maritime border security, providing critical intelligence and rapid-response capabilities.

Homeland Security Investigation also plays a critical role in maritime border security, primarily serving as the investigative arm for transnational criminal activity. HSI investigates transnational criminal organizations involved in a broad range of crimes, such as

trafficking narcotics and human smuggling. This is truly a team effort with each agency bringing in a unique skill set.

Success also relies on us working with our international partners. To enhance these efforts, I have been working with committee staff and intend to introduce legislation that would enhance the presence and operation of CBP in foreign countries working alongside other law enforcement agencies. This bill would greatly expand CBP's capability for targeting threats abroad before they reach our shore.

Let me be clear, border security does not stop at our land border. DHS maritime operations have resulted in an untold number of vessels being interdicted with aliens attempting to illegally enter our country, as well as hundreds of thousands of pounds of illicit drugs seized annually at our maritime border. Securing our maritime border is essential to protecting our national security. Confronting these threats protects the safety of our families and communities across this great Nation. I look forward to today's discussion and working with my colleagues to find solutions that enhance and prioritize maritime border security.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Chairman Guest. I now recognize the Ranking Member for the Subcommittee on Border Security Enforcement, the gentlewoman from Illinois, Mrs. Ramirez, for her opening statement.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Thank you, Chairman Gimenez. Good morning. I want to first start by thanking our witnesses for being here today.

Despite the administration having so much to answer for, today in our committee it is one of our first hearings with Government officials outside of Secretary Noem that was with us a couple weeks ago. I find it shameful that it took until June for my colleagues to request that administration officials appear before us, but I am certainly glad that you are finally here.

Look, I agree that maritime security is important and we certainly should be discussing how we are redirecting resources to use them outside of the mission, as Mrs. McIver so eloquently stated in her opening remarks. I would support having a full hearing to discuss that if we were not in extraordinary times. However, we are in extraordinary times.

Our communities, and I want to make sure we visualize this because I know my colleagues are going to try to say the opposite here, are being terrorized by the weaponization of the Government and the military against U.S. citizens. The Trump administration is using authoritarian tactics to incite fear and chaos in our communities. Why? So they can further weaponize the Government to exert control and suppress dissent.

Let's look at Los Angeles. Heavily-armed, masked agents conducted military-style raids at places like Home Depots, a donut shop, and a clothing wholesaler. These are purposely inflammatory tactics meant to escalate violence and justify further violations of our Constitutional rights and our civil liberties. These kidnappings are targeting mothers, children, and law-abiding neighbors who have contributed to our communities for years and have complied with the course requirements, attending check-in appointments when asked to do so.

Do you know why I can tell you this with confidence? Because that is what is happening in Chicago. I texted law-abiding members of our community for unscheduled check-ins and were told that within days they had to present themselves for a check-in. When they showed up, many of them mothers, their case was immediately dismissed, followed by ICE agents waiting for them at the door to handcuff them, put them in freight elevators, and rush them out in order to shove them into vans while wearing masks. Can you imagine that was happening to one of your family members? They are using text messages to call people in to arrest the exact immigrants who are demonstrating their commitment to the law by complying with ICE's instructions. To me, that runs counter to every claim the Trump administration has made, but it is consistent with reporting that the administration's actual intent is to simply maximize arrest.

For this administration let me be very clear, the terror is the point. They are kidnapping people. They are tearing families apart. They are deporting United States citizens, including United States citizen children with cancer. They are ignoring our right to due process and, in doing so, are making mistakes they call administrative errors as they arrest and deport people. Just last week, DHS had to return a Guatemalan man wrongfully deported to Mexico, despite fearing he would be persecuted there. They finally returned Kilmar Abrego Garcia to the United States, who now faces what could be trumped-up charges.

We have all heard about the others disappeared to a prison in El Salvador based on allegations of being in a gang, including Andry Hernandez Romero, a gay makeup artist, who legally arrived to the United States the way many others have for generations, seeking asylum. The only so-called evidence this administration has given of him being in a gang is tattoos of his parents' names with crowns.

But this administration's obsession with persecuting immigrants and achieving their mass deportation means they are using every resource they can, instead of keeping their community safe, to terrorize them. We are seeing the CBP and law enforcement agencies like FBI, DEA, and ATF focus on rounding up law-abiding, contributing immigrants in their communities. The message sent to our communities through these actions are the Trump administration does not care if you are complying with the law because they don't respect the rule of law. They don't care if you have Constitutional rights because, let's be honest, they don't respect the Constitution. They only care about the arbitrary deportation quotas that have been set by who? Stephen Miller.

Not only are these officers not doing the jobs they were hired to do, you know, like pursuing child abusers, investigating sex trafficking, or weapons smuggling, they are terrorizing our communities while wearing masks. You know who else wears? People committing crimes, executioners, prison guards in CECOT, Klansmen, people who don't want to be held accountable for what they do because they know their actions violate the foundations of our shared humanity.

So, yes, we need oversight of this administration. The most urgent need is to rein in the abuses of power that make all of us less

safe all over this country. Today, let me be clear, they are violating immigrants' Constitutional rights. They are stripping our communities of due process, and they are seeking to separate us from our humanity. But here is what is happening. They are testing our limits now because they intend to use the same playbook next on anyone they deem undesirable. This committee's responsibility is to oversight, not to the President of the United States of America.

With that, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member Ramirez follows:]

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE DELIA C. RAMIREZ

JUNE 10, 2025

Despite the administration having so much to answer for, today is one of our committee's first hearing with Government officials, outside of Secretary Noem a few weeks back. It is shameful that it took until June for my colleagues to request that administration officials appear before us. I am certainly glad that you are finally here.

I agree that maritime security is important. And we certainly should be discussing the resources are being redirected outside of the mission. And I would support having a full hearing to discuss this if we were not in extraordinary times. However, we are in extraordinary times. Our communities are being terrorized by the weaponization of the Government and the military against U.S. citizens.

The Trump administration is using authoritarian tactics to incite fear and chaos in our communities so they can further weaponize the Government to exert control and suppress dissent. Let's look at Los Angeles: Heavily-armed, masked agents conducted military-style raids at places like Home Depot, a donut shop, and a clothing wholesaler. These are purposefully inflammatory tactics meant to escalate violence and justify further violations of our Constitutional rights and civil liberties.

And these kidnappings are targeting mothers, children, and law-abiding neighbors who have contributed to our communities for years and have complied with the courts' requirements, attending check-in appointments when asked to do so. Do you know why I can say that with confidence? Because that's what is happening in Chicago.

ICE texted law-abiding members of our communities for unscheduled check-ins and were told that within days they had to present themselves for a check in. When they showed up, many of them mothers, their cases were immediately dismissed followed by ICE agents waiting for them at the door to handcuff them, put them in freight elevators, and rush them out in order to shove them into vans while wearing masks. Can you imagine if that happened to one of your family members?

They are using text messages to call people in to arrest the exact immigrants who are demonstrating their commitment to the law by complying with ICE's instructions. This runs counter to every claim the Trump administration has made—but is consistent with reporting that the administration's actual intent is to simply maximize arrests. For this administration, let me very clear—the terror is the point.

They are kidnapping people. They are tearing families apart. They are deporting U.S. citizens, including U.S. citizen children with cancer. They are ignoring our right to due process and, in doing so, are making mistakes they call administrative errors as they arrest and deport people. Just last week, DHS had to return a Guatemalan man wrongfully deported to Mexico despite fearing he would be persecuted there.

And they finally returned Kilmar Abrego Garcia to the United States, who now faces what could be trumped-up charges.

We've all heard about the others disappeared to a prison in El Salvador, based on allegations of being in a gang—including Andry Hernandez Romero, a gay make-up artist who legally arrived to the United States seeking asylum. The only so-called evidence this administration has given of him being in a gang is tattoos of his parents' names with crowns.

But this administration's obsession with persecuting immigrants and achieving their mass deportations means they are using every resource they can to, instead of keeping our communities safe, to terrorize them. We're seeing the CBP and law enforcement agencies like the FBI, DEA, and ATF focus on rounding up law-abiding, contributing immigrants in our communities.

The message sent to our communities through these actions are:

The Trump administration does not care if you are complying with the law because they do not respect the rule of law. They do not care if you have Constitutional rights because they do not respect the Constitution. They only care about the arbitrary deportation quotas set by Steven Miller.

Not only are these officers NOT doing the jobs they were hired to do—like pursuing child abusers, investigating sex trafficking, or weapons smuggling—they are terrorizing our communities while wearing masks . . . You know who else wears masks—people committing crimes, executioners, prison guards in CECOT, Klansmen. People who don't want to be held accountable for what they do because they know their actions violate the foundations of our shared humanity. So, we need oversight of this administration. And the most urgent need is to rein in the abuses of power that make all of us less safe all over this country.

Today, they are violating immigrants' Constitutional rights, stripping our communities of due process, and they are seeking to separate us from our humanity. They are testing the limits now because they intend to use this same playbook next on anyone they deem undesirable. This committee's responsibility is to oversight and not to the President of the United States of America.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Ranking Member. Other Members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

JUNE 10, 2025

I am glad the subcommittees are holding this hearing to help examine how the Trump administration's policies and practices are affecting illicit maritime activities. I have sat on this committee since its inception. I believe deeply in the Department of Homeland Security's mission statement which states, "With Honor and integrity, we will safeguard the American people, our homeland, and our values." I wish the Trump administration believed in this mission as strongly as my fellow Democrats and I do.

The actions of this administration are completely devoid of honor and integrity, and our homeland is less safe as a result. Just this past weekend, we witnessed President Trump send the military to the streets of Los Angeles to stop protests against immigration raids.

This is the same President who, in 2021, sat on his hands and laughed as actual insurrectionists stormed the Capitol Building, beat cops with weapons, broke windows, destroyed property, and looked to capture and kill elected officials. Trump would not call the National Guard when the police who protect this Capitol were being beaten to a pulp, but he did not hesitate to unnecessarily send them to Los Angeles.

Additionally, over the weekend, the Ranking Member of our Border Security and Enforcement Subcommittee, Congressman Correa, along with several other Members, were turned away from an ICE facility when they arrived to conduct oversight, in yet another example of the Trump-Noem DHS not following the law.

We are also witnessing the Trump administration pulling agents and officers off their regular duties to focus on deporting non-criminals—which takes them away from investigations into actual criminals and is making us less safe. Under this administration, HSI agents have less time to investigate child traffickers, gun smuggling, drug running, and other crimes because they are dedicated to deportations. The administration's direction for the Coast Guard is likewise misguided.

Secretary Noem stated in the Coast Guard's new Force Design 2028 plan that the Coast Guard "is fragile, in crisis, and on a path to failure . . . The Service is in a downward readiness spiral that is unsustainable. Without change, the Coast Guard will fail". So, what changes has Secretary Noem implemented to address this crisis and keep the Coast Guard from failing?

Most immediately, Secretary Noem is trying to have the Coast Guard fund a new $50 million Gulfstream V jet for her to use, even as the service has many older aircraft in more urgent need of replacement. For an administration that is supposedly uncovering waste, fraud, and abuse, this request reeks to high heaven. Beyond that request, Secretary Noem has directed the Coast Guard to surge its limited resources away from its many critical missions, including in the Indo-Pacific and the Arctic.

Instead of using all available resources to counter Russia and China, the Coast Guard is now in the shuttle service business, flying gardeners, cooks, farmhands, and housecleaners from ICE detention centers to deportation staging facilities. It is

a disservice to our constituents to divert our brave Coast Guard service members from life-saving missions to make them operate the Greyhound of the sky.

The Trump administration is placing deportations above all else, which undermines our homeland security and makes us all less safe. This administration does not represent the values on which this country was built, nor those on which the Department of Homeland Security was founded. To put it in maritime terms, President Trump and Secretary Noem have missed the boat. We in Congress need to help DHS correct course to meet its mission.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I am pleased to have a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this critical topic. I ask that our witnesses please rise and raise their right hands.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. GIMENEZ. Let the record reflect that the witnesses have answered in the affirmative. Thank you, and please be seated.

I would now like to formally introduce our witnesses. Jonathan Miller is the executive assistant commissioner for Air and Maritime Operations, U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Mr. Miller brings over 28 years of Federal law enforcement and leadership experience. He began his career with U.S. Border Patrol in San Diego, serving on the Special Response Team and Border Patrol Tactical Unit before transferring to the Miami sector for maritime patrols. That is a pretty nice sector. In 2007, he joined Air and Marine Operations in Miami, advancing through various roles, including vessel commander, marine instructor supervisor, marine interdiction agent, and several senior executive positions before assuming his current role.

Rear Admiral Adam Chamie assumed the role of Coast Guard assistant commandant for response policy in May 2024, overseeing strategic doctrine and policy for 7 of the Coast Guard's 11 operational missions, including law enforcement and maritime security. A 1996 graduate of the Coast Guard Academy, Rear Admiral Chamie has commanded 3 Coast Guard cutters and served on 3 others, conducting operations from the Bering Sea to the Arabian Gulf. His prior ashore assignments include commander of Sector Key West, chief of Congressional affairs, and Coast Guard liaison to the House of Representatives.

James C. Harris is the assistant director, Countering Transnational Organized Crime at Homeland Security Investigations. In this position, he develops and executes strategies aimed at disrupting and dismantling criminal networks and works alongside policy makers to improve laws and regulations that strengthen HSI's efforts in combating transnational organized crime. Prior to this assignment, Mr. Harris served as the director of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Center for Countering Human Trafficking.

Heather MacLeod is a director in the Government Accountability Office, Homeland Security and Justice Team. She oversees Coast Guard and maritime security issues, including Coast Guard work force and strategic planning efforts, and maritime port and supply chain cargo security. Heather joined GAO in 2002, and has led projects examining aviation safety, airline competition, transit programs, and highway bridge management.

I thank each of our distinguished witnesses for being here today.

I now recognize Mr. Miller for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JONATHAN P. MILLER, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER, AIR AND MARINE OPERATIONS, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

Mr. MILLER. Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Guest, Ranking Member McIver, Ranking Member Ramirez, and distinguished Members of the subcommittees, it is an honor to appear before you today on behalf of the men and women of Air and Marine Operations, or AMO, to discuss our critical role in the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's comprehensive approach to maritime border security.

The maritime domain presents unique national security challenges. Unlike air and land environments, coastal waters are vast and less restricted. Countless vessels enter or operate in U.S. territorial waters every day, making detection of illegal activity and apprehending associated smugglers challenging. Many smuggling crafts hide in plain sight amongst legitimate traffic while others transit remote areas far offshore, trying to elude detection altogether.

Smugglers also use a variety of vessels tailored to the area and amounts of contraband they are smuggling to best evade detection. Vessels are also much faster than they were 20 years ago today, often leaving law enforcement little time to interdict them before reaching our shores.

Immediately following the President's declaration of a national emergency at the Southern Border, AMO, in concert with other CBP and DHS partners took action, realigning vessels and aircraft patrols in anticipation of increased maritime activity due to the decrease in illegal crossings at the land borders. In Southern California, we've seen a 30 percent increase in vessel seizures and over 100 percent increase in maritime apprehensions since January compared to the same time frame last year.

Additionally, maritime drug smuggling activity is a perpetual and dangerous threat to U.S. border security. Of the 234,000 pounds of drugs AMO seized in 2024, approximately 76 percent occurred in the maritime environment.

In addition to high maritime drug interdiction rates, smuggler aggression and violence has also been on the rise. Noncompliant boardings and instances where we forcibly disabled the engines of smuggling vessels to get them to stop has exponentially risen in the past few years. In November 2022, 3 of my Marine agents were shot and one of them, Michael Maceda, was killed during a vessel stop of smugglers off the coast of Puerto Rico.

AMO deploys a fleet of some of the most powerful law enforcement marine interceptors in the world. Evolving to meet today's threats, we've recently repowered these vessels and made other modifications to this platform for a perfect mix of speed, agility, and agent safety. I appreciate the committee's support in these recapitalization efforts.

AMO also maintains a fleet of aircraft functionally designed and outfitted for maritime detection and surveillance. Our P3s, –8s, and MQ–9 UAS aircraft are capable of long-range, high-endurance CONUS and OCONUS patrols, while the Super King Air 350 further expands aerial surveillance in the littorals of the United States and the Caribbean. AMO is heavily invested in a variety of

tethered aerostats, towers, and tactical systems providing radar and sensor capabilities, significantly increasing our domain awareness along our littoral borders, and the maritime approaches around the continental United States, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning play a critical part in filtering nefarious from legitimate traffic activity and we've had success in using this technology to build algorithms identifying patterns to filter the sheer volume of traffic.

Once again, I'd like to thank the Members of this committee for supporting these critical efforts and further acquisitions that will ultimately enable 24/7 domain awareness of prioritized maritime littoral approaches.

The scale and complexity of countering drug trafficking and human smuggling in the maritime environment requires partnerships and collaboration. In addition, to the U.S. Coast Guard, AMO routinely works with Federal, State, local, and foreign partners, and has been one of the largest contributors of flight hours to Joint Interagency Task Force South, supporting counter narcotics operations and the vast 42 million square mile sourcing transit zones.

With few exceptions, AMO's maritime law enforcement authority is limited to Customs' waters or 12 nautical miles from the coastline of the United States. CBP continues to work with Congress on legislative changes to extend the Customs' waters from 12 to 24 nautical miles. This extension of law enforcement authorities would enable AMO to expand patrols, increasing our ability to save lives at sea, conduct counternarcotics operations, support our partners, and carry out the border security mission.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to answering your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Miller follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JONATHAN P. MILLER

JUNE 10, 2025

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Guest, Ranking Member McIver, Ranking Member Correa, and distinguished Members of the subcommittees, it is a privilege to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Air and Marine Operations' unwavering commitment to interdicting illegal drugs, preventing human smuggling, and securing our Nation's borders, maritime domain, and approaches. As a front-line law enforcement component of CBP, Air and Marine Operations operates in source and transit zones, between ports of entry, in coastal waters, and interior waterways.

Born out of the legacy U.S. Customs Service, Air and Marine Operations was established in 2006 as an integral part of CBP's comprehensive border security mission and the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) risk-based and multi-layered approach to national security. Air and Marine Operations agents are Federal law enforcement officers [1] with a broad range of legal authorities, specialized assets, and unique operational capabilities that enable them to detect and interdict illegal activity at and beyond our Nation's borders in the land, air, and sea domains, providing a critical layer of continuity in border security operations.

[1] 6 U.S.C. § 211(f); 19 U.S.C. § 1589a; 8 U.S.C § 1357.

STATE OF THE MARITIME BORDER

While CBP reasserts control of our borders[2] in accordance with President Trump's directives, transnational criminal organizations and foreign terrorist organizations continue their efforts to smuggle people and contraband into our country. These organizations operate with immense capability, capacity, and nearly unlimited resources. Their smuggling operations are sophisticated, and they continually adjust their tactics, techniques, and routes to circumvent detection and interdiction by law enforcement.

Illicit activity in the maritime environment is a threat to U.S. border and national security. The maritime domain is generally less restricted than the air and land environments. Thousands of vessels enter or operate in U.S. territorial waters every day. Detecting illegal activity can be challenging, as many smuggling craft hide in plain sight among legitimate traffic, while others transit remote areas far offshore to try to elude detection. Additionally, smugglers use a variety of craft tailored to the area and cargo they are smuggling, including modified fishing boats, go-fast vessels, pangas,[3] low-profile vessels, and semi-submersibles. Vessels are much faster than they were 20 years ago, often leaving law enforcement little time to interdict them before reaching our shores.

Encounters with smugglers can also be extremely dangerous. Since its creation in 2006, Air and Marine Operations has used disabling fire on the engines of fleeing smuggler vessels nearly 350 times. Additionally, in November 2022, 3 Air and Marine Operations Marine Interdiction Agents were shot—and one of them, Michel Maceda, tragically killed—during a vessel stop off the coast of Puerto Rico.[4] Precise engagement and rapid neutralization of risk is key to safely resolving water-based law enforcement actions. Air and Marine Operations continually refines its maritime interdiction capabilities and tactics to meet ever evolving threats.

AIR AND MARINE OPERATIONS' MARITIME BORDER SECURITY OPERATIONS

Air and Marine Operations remains at the forefront of the Nation's efforts to combat drug smuggling and illegal immigration through the maritime domain. Immediately following President Trump's declaration of a national emergency at the Southern Border, Air and Marine Operations—in concert with our other CBP and DHS partners—took action to expand its maritime enforcement efforts and safeguard the American people.

With the historic decrease in illegal crossings in the land environment, Air and Marine Operations realigned maritime aircraft and increased patrols, resulting in a 90 percent increase in maritime apprehensions of illegal aliens in Southern California.[5] Since January 21, 2025, Air and Marine Operations enforcement efforts across all our maritime operational environments have led to the apprehension of over 750 aliens, with 60 percent occurring in South Florida and the Caribbean Sea.

Aliens attempting to make the journey to the United States along maritime routes take an enormous risk, putting their lives in the hands of transnational criminal organizations, foreign terrorist organizations, or other human smuggling networks and often in unsafe, rustic vessels. The weather at sea is unpredictable, and the vessels that make it far enough for Air and Marine Operations to encounter are often dangerously overloaded with illegal aliens. Air and Marine Operations encounters with these vessels typically become rescue missions in addition to apprehension actions. Just last month, Air and Marine Operations responded to reports of an overturned panga-style boat that washed ashore in San Diego.[6] At least 3 people died, including 1 child. Another child on board was never recovered and is presumed dead. Not only was the vessel unsuitable for the quantity of people on board, but it was also incapable of handling the perilous sea conditions. This event was another tragic reminder of how smugglers operate with total disregard for human life. Secretary Noem is seeking capital punishment for these crimes.[7]

In addition to responding to increasing numbers of maritime alien encounters, Air and Marine Operations continues to intercept tons of dangerous illicit drugs, keeping them from reaching our shores and communities. In fiscal year 2024, Air and

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[2] *https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/04/28/100-days-most-secure-border-american-history*.

[3] A small boat, often used for fishing, and typically powered by an outboard motor.

[4] *https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/speeches-and-statements/cbp-marine-interdiction-agent-dies-line-duty-near-puerto-rico*.

[5] From January 21, 2025–May 19, 2025, compared to the same date range in 2024.

[6] *https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdca/pr/five-charged-human-smuggling-event-led-least-three-deaths*.

[7] *https://www.dhs.gov/news/2025/05/06/secretary-noem-requests-death-penalty-against-alleged-human-smugglers-whose-actions*.

Marine Operations enforcement efforts led to the seizure of 233,662 pounds of illegal drugs.[8] Approximately 76 percent of these drugs—including more than 160,000 pounds of cocaine, 15,000 pounds of marijuana, and 170 pounds of methamphetamine—were intercepted in the maritime environment.

Air and Marine Operations remains vigilant and continually adjusts our operations as transnational criminal organizations, foreign terrorist organizations, and human smugglers seek to shift their criminal activities from long-standing land-based pathways to alternative maritime routes.

MARITIME ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES

Despite Air and Marine Operations' unique cross-domain law enforcement capabilities, in the maritime environment, Air and Marine Operations' maritime law enforcement authority[9] is generally limited[10] to areas within the historical "customs waters"[11]—or 12 nautical miles from the coastline—of the United States. This constraint limits Air and Marine Operations' ability to effectively counter current and evolving modern threats in the maritime environment. Specifically, as modern technology continues to change and advance rapidly, the performance and speed of maritime vessels improves, including those used to violate U.S. law or evade U.S. law enforcement. These advancements render Air and Marine Operations' authority to operate only within the 12-nautical-mile zone inadequate, placing our law enforcement capability at a significant disadvantage and often preventing Air and Marine Operations' interdiction of vessels in time to prevent their escape.

CBP appreciates our continuing collaboration with Congress on legislative changes that would extend the limits of customs waters. Expansion of Air and Marine Operations' authority to operate, through the extension of the 12-nautical-mile customs waters, would enable Air and Marine Operations to better leverage its cross-domain authorities, enhance its detection of and response to the modern and sophisticated capabilities of smugglers and transnational criminal organizations, and better support its law enforcement partners in the maritime environment.

INTERDICTION ASSETS, CAPABILITIES, AND TECHNOLOGY

Air and Marine Operations is committed to its maritime security mission and continues to make investments in its highly-trained agents, vessels, aircraft, and technological capabilities to advance the effectiveness of its operations. These investments not only support Air and Marine Operations' on-going ability to effectively respond to illegal drug activity in the maritime environment but also contribute to other Air and Marine Operations enforcement actions, including those that led to over 1,000 arrests as well as the seizure of 1,500 weapons and $12.6 million in U.S. currency in fiscal year 2024.

Specialized law enforcement personnel are essential to Air and Marine Operations' maritime border security mission. These highly-skilled agents must be capable of not only enforcing a broad range of U.S. laws, but also safely and effectively doing so in the complex—and often dangerous—maritime environment. While recruitment for these positions can be challenging, Air and Marine Operations is actively pursuing opportunities to attract and onboard qualified talent at all levels of experience. We are focused on maximizing the capacity of our marine units in the Caribbean, South Florida, and Southern California where we have a high tempo of maritime activity.

Vessels tailored for Air and Marine Operations' specific law enforcement operations are a key aspect of its maritime border security mission. For example, Air and Marine Operations deploys a fleet of high-speed Coastal Interceptor Vessels engineered for rapid pursuit and interdiction of non-compliant vessels. These vessels are crewed by highly-trained agents authorized to use all necessary force, including warning shots and disabling fire, to stop fleeing vessels.

In addition to our maritime interdiction efforts with our marine interceptors on the water, we also contribute a significant amount of air assets to these operations. Air and Marine Operations' fleet of maritime patrol aircraft are functionally designed and outfitted for maritime detection and surveillance. The P–3s and

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[8] *https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/cbp-enforcement-statistics/air-and-marine-operations-statistics*.

[9] See, e.g. 19 U.S.C. §§ 1581, 1587, 1589a.

[10] In certain circumstances, Air and Marine Operations is authorized to operate on the high seas, for instance when enforcing laws on U.S. registered vessels (19 C.F.R. § 162.3), hovering vessels (19 U.S.C. § 1401(k); 19 U.S.C. § 1587(a)), and vessels subject to hot pursuit (19 U.S.C. § 1581(d)). Additionally, beyond the customs waters, Air and Marine Operations may enforce the Maritime Drug Law Enforcement Act (46 U.S.C. §§ 70501–70502), where appropriate.

[11] 19 U.S.C. §§ 1401(j), 1709(c).

DHC–8 aircraft provide long-range, high-endurance capabilities in remote source and transit zones while the Super King Air 350 Multi-Role Enforcement Aircraft further expand aerial surveillance, closing detection and enforcement gaps in the Caribbean. Equipped with advanced sensors, communications, and radar systems, these aircraft are credited with the interdiction of 150,380 pounds of cocaine and 11,670 flight hours within the Western Hemisphere Transit Zones in fiscal year 2024, which equated to 13 pounds of narcotics interdicted per flight hour.

The use of unmanned aircraft systems in the maritime environment has also increased Air and Marine Operations' ability to effectively identify, detect, monitor, and track conveyances involved in illegal activity. In partnership with DHS's Science and Technology Directorate, Air and Marine Operations modified 2 MQ–9s to Big Wing variants, significantly increasing fuel capacity and flight endurance. These Big Wing aircraft have the added ability to surveil surface targets much longer while awaiting interdiction surface forces to arrive. Air and Marine Operations has been employing unmanned aircraft systems in the maritime environment since 2020, contributing to the seizure of over 81,000 pounds of cocaine and 46,000 pounds of marijuana.

Air and Marine Operations is heavily invested in a variety of ground-based radars and sensors increasing maritime domain awareness along our littoral borders. We strategically deployed several maritime approach surveillance towers in the Caribbean Basin that overlap to provide persistent wide-area surveillance and detection capabilities in high-risk areas. Additionally, we've taken tethered aerostats traditionally used for air detection and integrated maritime surface radars to utilize them in support of maritime interdiction operations. These tools have significantly increased our situational awareness of the maritime approaches around Puerto Rico, South Texas into the Gulf of America, and the Florida Straits. Other tower and ground-based radar systems have provided additional radar detection around Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands, South Florida, and the Great Lakes. Over the last 3 years, these systems have cumulatively contributed to the seizure of over 17,200 pounds of cocaine, 15,600 pounds of illegally obtained marine life from illicit fishing practices, and $2 million in U.S. currency.

Advanced technology, including the BigPipe real-time video system and the Minotaur mission integration system, link Air and Marine Operations' tactical assets, aircraft, and vessels, thereby providing Air and Marine Operations with a streamlined and efficient information-collecting and -sharing capability. The Air and Marine Operations Center simultaneously tracks, processes, and integrates multiple sensor feeds and sources of information to provide comprehensive domain awareness in support of CBP's border security mission.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning initiatives at Air and Marine Operations are improving threat detection efforts by processing vast amounts of surveillance data in real time. By leveraging artificial intelligence, Air and Marine Operations is advancing the efficiency and effectiveness of our maritime domain awareness. In areas where there is a high concentration of recreational vessels, Air and Marine Operations uses artificial intelligence technology to assist in filtering nefarious from recreational traffic. We have had success in using this technology to build algorithms that can identify patterns among a high volume of tracks on the radar.

Air and Marine Operations will continue to modernize its fleet and sensor systems to enhance its data analysis capabilities and operational performance in diverse marine environments and increase its ability to adapt to the challenges of securing the maritime border and approaches to the United States.

OPERATIONAL COORDINATION

Using a whole-of-Government approach, Air and Marine Operations leverages interagency partnerships through the Global Maritime Operational Threat Response Coordination Center including the U.S. Coast Guard, Department of State, Department of Defense, as well as collaborations with other State, local, Tribal, and foreign partners. Air and Marine Operations works closely with DHS Joint Task Force East and is one of the largest contributors of flight hours to Joint Interagency Task Force South, supporting counternarcotics operations in the 42 million square miles of source and transit zones spanning the Pacific, Atlantic, and Caribbean. Frequent cooperation with foreign partners is imperative. Over the last few years, Air and Marine Operations has increased its focus on the Eastern Caribbean and strengthened partnerships in the Lesser Antilles, creating a force multiplier of surveillance and interdiction assets throughout the southern approaches to Puerto Rico.

CONCLUSION

Since its creation in 2006, Air and Marine Operations has evolved into one of the world's largest civilian forces for aviation and maritime law enforcement. A critical component of CBP's border security mission, Air and Marine Operations monitors and patrols vast areas of air, sea, and land around the clock, defending the United States against threats at and beyond our borders.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Mr. Miller.

I now recognize Rear Admiral Chamie for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statements.

STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL ADAM A. CHAMIE, ASSISTANT COMMANDANT FOR RESPONSE POLICY, U.S. COAST GUARD

Admiral CHAMIE. Good morning, Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Guest, Ranking Member McIver, Ranking Member Ramirez, and Members of the committee. I request my written testimony be submitted for the record.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Without objection.

Admiral CHAMIE. Thank you, sir. Thank you for your enduring support for the Coast Guard and the men and women who volunteer to serve. The Coast Guard is busier than ever and laser-focused on border security. Following the President's declaration of a national emergency at the Southern Border, the Coast Guard surged aircraft, cutters, boats, and people. We tripled our force laydown and we made it clear that our highest mission priority was to achieve full operational control of the maritime border.

The Coast Guard works closely with the DOD, Joint Force, DHS components, and the U.S. interagency. Together, we synchronize operations with the singular goal to protect our territorial integrity and our Nation's sovereign interests. I'd like to highlight 3 ways we control, secure, and defend our U.S. borders and maritime approaches.

First, we deter and interdict illegal aliens attempting to reach the United States by sea. The aliens typically depart countries like Haiti, Cuba, the Bahamas, and Mexico, but they vary in nationality from across the globe. They use everything from handmade wooden boats to sail freighters to speedboats to sport fishers to jet skis. Frequently, these smuggling ventures are organized by transnational criminal organizations or cartels. In the past 5 months, we've interdicted almost 1,000 illegal aliens.

The second way we defend our U.S. borders is by going toe-to-toe with the cartels who smuggle drugs into our country. This fiscal year, our crews have removed 160 metric tons of cocaine and detained over 300 smugglers. This past February, we surpassed the amount of drugs we removed in all of fiscal year 2024. The cartels are working hard, but our Coast Guard crews are working harder.

The interdiction of cocaine matters because the same cartels who smuggle cocaine produce and smuggle fentanyl. Once we detain the smugglers, we work with our partners and the intelligence community to determine who these criminals are and how and where these cartels operate. Cocaine is the cash crop for cartels. Their huge profits from cocaine fund other nefarious activities like human trafficking, weapons smuggling, and production of synthetic drugs. Fentanyl remains the leading cause of drug-related deaths

in our country, but cocaine still kills upwards of 25,000 Americans every year.

The third way the Coast Guard defends our border is at our ports and waterways in both physical space and cyber space. The United States is home to 361 commercial ports that facilitate $4.6 trillion in commerce—correction, $4.6 trillion in commerce each year. Our ports create incredible economic opportunity, but they also present a significant risk if not properly hardened. We work across the intelligence community and with partners, like Customs and Border Protection, to identify and mitigate those threats.

Our Coast Guard men and women are doing a great job, but our efforts are not sustainable. We are at the lowest state of readiness since World War II. To overcome this crisis Secretary Noem has directed us to transform the Coast Guard into a more agile, capable, and responsive force. Without change, the Coast Guard will fail. We will not fail.

The Secretary's plan to revolutionize the Coast Guard is called Force Design 28. Under this plan and with the support of Congress and the administration, we will transform from the top down. We will establish a service secretary like the other military services. We will streamline command and control to make us more agile, a more agile fighting force that empowers our operators to make decisions.

We will grow our service by at least 15,000 people to restore readiness and operate new ships, aircraft, and technology to improve operations and deliver mission results. Finally, we will streamline our contracting and acquisitions to deliver the capabilities our crews need at speed.

The Coast Guard is extremely grateful to this Congress for their support to include the $21.2 billion in reconciliation passed by the House. The Coast Guard's future depends on reconciliation and an increase in our top-line budget. Since 1790, the Coast Guard has ensured our national sovereignty and protected our shores. With your support, we will do it for another 235 years.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Chamie follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF REAR ADMIRAL ADAM A. CHAMIE

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Guest, Ranking Member McIver, Ranking Member Correa, and distinguished Members of the subcommittees, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am thankful for your enduring support of the United States Coast Guard and honored to be here today to discuss the Service's role in controlling, securing, and defending America's maritime border.

The United States is a maritime nation with 95,000 miles of shoreline and 361 commercial ports connecting 25,000 miles of navigable channels facilitating the flow of $5.4 trillion dollars of maritime economic commerce. More than 90 percent of overseas trade cargo enters or leaves the United States by ship. As a vital instrument of national power within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Coast Guard is 1 of the 6 military services, a Federal law enforcement agency, and member of the intelligence community. We control, secure, and defend the U.S. border and maritime approaches from maritime threats; ensure the safe and secure flow of commerce; respond to natural disasters; and save lives. I am pleased to share with you how we leverage our unique authorities, capabilities, and relationships with international, Federal, State, local, and Tribal partners, and how we operationalize a layered approach to securing our maritime border and protecting

our communities from Transnational Criminal Organizations and other maritime threats.

Transnational Criminal Organizations pose a significant threat to our Nation's maritime border security, as they operate across national boundaries, smuggling illicit drugs like cocaine, fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine into the United States, bringing violence, death, destruction, and crime into our communities. These commodities provide lucrative revenue streams that fund terrorism and other nefarious activities such as the trafficking of people, weapons, and illicit goods, destabilizing the region and promoting illegal migration—we must continue to take action against these organizations. No single agency can dismantle this threat alone.

U.S. COAST GUARD AUTHORITIES, RESPONSIBILITIES, & CAPABILITIES

The Coast Guard is the lead Federal agency for maritime law enforcement, including drug interdiction on the high seas; we share the lead for drug interdiction in U.S. territorial seas with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The Coast Guard partners with the Department of Defense through Joint Interagency Task Force—South for detection and monitoring of illicit drugs bound for the United States. Coast Guard drug interdictions historically focused on cocaine and marijuana, and serve the whole-of-Government effort to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations. Cocaine interdictions at sea cut off a critical source of funding for the same Transnational Criminal Organizations that produce and smuggle fentanyl, and in turn impair their efforts to produce and smuggle fentanyl into the United States. Furthermore, our Coast Guard Intelligence personnel work closely with our Intelligence Community partners to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations that threaten the United States.

Coast Guard forces deploy to the 2 major drug transit corridors in the Western Hemisphere, the Eastern Pacific and Caribbean, to deter, detect, and interdict maritime drug trafficking events. Coast Guard deployments are complementary to U.S. Navy, Canadian, British, and Dutch naval deployments with embarked Coast Guard Law Enforcement Detachments, capitalizing on the Coast Guard's authorities and expertise to interdict narcotics before they approach our borders.

These surface assets are supported by Coast Guard, CBP Air and Marine Operations, U.S. Navy, and Dutch fixed-wing aircraft, and are of critical importance to the detection and monitoring of these Transnational Criminal Organizations. This has proven to be a successful approach and asset composition.

In addition to our at-sea assets and Law Enforcement Detachments, the Coast Guard maintains a physical presence in 30 countries around the world to serve in various capacities to include security cooperation officers, maritime advisors, attachés, liaisons, interdiction and prosecution team support, or technical experts. Through these integrated touchpoints, we work with our partners to identify challenges to overcome and opportunities to increase their capabilities to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations inside their own borders and maritime jurisdictional zones. The Coast Guard maintains more than 40 bilateral maritime law enforcement agreements that enable operations on partner-nation-flagged vessels suspected of illicit trafficking on the high seas and in waters subject to their jurisdiction. These types of international activities enable partner nations to increase the expertise of their workforce, enhance their maritime capabilities, and empower regional countries to lead coordinated efforts to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations at the source.

Along the U.S. coast, the Service's sectors, boat stations, air stations, and patrol boat fleet provides an integrated law enforcement capability that protects our shores from invasion. These assets and skilled personnel work closely with interagency partners to identify and interdict illegal smuggling activities that seek to traffic drugs and aliens across the border.

Approximately 80 percent of drug seizures each year occur in the maritime domain in operations executed by the Coast Guard and its interagency and international partners. Year-over-year, seizures by Coast Guard personnel account for roughly 50 percent of all drug seizures by U.S. law enforcement conducted in the transit and arrival zones. In fiscal year 2024, the Coast Guard removed over 106 metric tons of cocaine, bringing our 6-year total to 873.5 metric tons removed. To date in fiscal year 2025, the Coast Guard has removed 135 metric tons of cocaine from the maritime domain, including a February offload of over 16.9 metric tons of cocaine worth over $275 million that will never hit the streets and poison the American people. Our layered approach to combat Transnational Criminal Organizations as far away from U.S. shores as practical is successful only through security cooperation and integrated deployments and engagements.

SOUTHEAST BORDER & MARITIME APPROACHES

The southeast maritime approaches to the United States experience significantly higher levels of irregular maritime migration than other maritime vectors and present the greatest risk of a mass migration event. Primary nationalities encountered in this region are Cubans, Haitians, and Dominicans. Cuban and Haitian aliens primarily use transit routes into Florida directly or via the Bahamas. Dominican and some Haitian aliens tend to transit routes across the Mona Passage to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Common conveyances used in this region range from fishing vessels, coastal freighters, sail freighters, go-fast type vessels, or rudimentary vessels called "rusticas." With the leadership of the DHS Secretary, the Coast Guard maintains an increased and active presence in these regularly-transited vectors to quickly respond to reports of suspicious vessels by international, Federal, State, and local partners, and deter departures from countries of origin.

SOUTHWEST BORDER & MARITIME APPROACHES

The southwest maritime border vector continues to record above-average illegal maritime migration events, but not to the same historical magnitude as in the southeastern maritime approaches. However, human smugglers rely primarily on "panga"-style personal watercraft and makeshift vessels with a capacity of approximately 30 aliens to continuously attempt illegal entries. Although aliens with a variety of nationalities are interdicted in this vector, the vast majority are Mexican. The Coast Guard relies heavily on CBP, our partners for processing.

THE GULF OF AMERICA

In the Gulf of America, illegal maritime migration events are organized and facilitated by human smuggling networks. In response to the national emergency on the border, the Coast Guard surged assets to the Rio Grande and is leveraging the capabilities of our deployable specialized forces to assist the United States Border Patrol in detecting and deterring aliens attempting to illegally cross the river. In fiscal year 2025, the Coast Guard has interdicted or deterred over 50 illegal aliens in the region. In these cases, the Coast Guard works with regional interagency partners to transfer interdicted aliens ashore to CBP.

Due to a perceived lack of legal consequences, illegal fishing activity by Mexican small craft fishing boats ("lanchas") in our Exclusive Economic Zone has continued to increase over the last 25 years, with the recidivism rate of many offenders exceeding 90 percent. One recently apprehended offender was previously caught by the Coast Guard more than 40 times. The Coast Guard has worked diligently with the interagency over the last several months to address this issue by enabling criminal prosecution of lancha crews. In one of the first cases pursued with this new approach, on May 13, 2025, a grand jury in Brownsville, Texas indicted 4 suspects for illegally harvesting red snapper in U.S. waters.

NORTHERN BORDER

The Northern Border is expansive and diverse, with numerous islands and waterways. The short distances between United States and Canadian territorial seas create unique opportunities for nefarious actors to exploit vulnerable maritime areas with a relatively small law enforcement presence. Maritime security threats along the Northern Border include both illegal maritime migration and drug trafficking.

To combat these threats and secure our Northern Border, the Coast Guard and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have developed a program to train and designate law enforcement officers to co-crew boats and aircraft to enforce Canadian and United States Federal laws on either side of the shared border. These operations provide the ability to share encrypted Automatic Identification System data to vastly improve cross-border domain awareness and provide a common tactical picture. Coast Guard and Royal Canadian Mounted Police teams conducted 123 cross-border operations in fiscal year 2024, resulting in over 500 boardings, 15 violations, and actively deterred illicit activity. This program exemplifies the collaborative efforts between the Coast Guard, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, CBP, and other State and local law enforcement working in concert to prevent Transnational Criminal Organizations from exploiting our Northern Border and endangering the American people.

COMBATTING FENTANYL

Combatting Fentanyl and its illegal precursors is one of the administration's top priorities and the Coast Guard has taken significant action. Fentanyl has been the leading cause of U.S. drug-related deaths since 2016, accounting for approximately

70 percent of U.S. drug overdose deaths in 2023. Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations are the primary source of synthetic opioid flow into the United States, predominantly across our Southwest Border. While bulk fentanyl has not been encountered in the maritime domain, the Coast Guard is leveraging our broad authorities, capabilities, and policies to seek out and interdict both fentanyl and illegal precursor chemicals. On January 31, 2025, the acting commandant directed immediate action to bolster operations to combat illegal fentanyl and the Service is seeking new ways to leverage our broad authorities and partnerships with other agencies.

CONCLUSION

The Coast Guard provides the Nation a tremendous return on investment. We control, secure, and defend the borders and maritime approaches in direct support of President Trump's Executive Orders. In order to conduct these vital missions, we must continue to invest in our workforce, re-capitalize aging assets and infrastructure, and integrate new technologies to position the Service to dismantle the Transnational Criminal Organizations that threaten our citizens and interdict aliens attempting to illegally enter our country. Thank you for your continued support of the Coast Guard and our work to ensure the safety and security of the American people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Rear Admiral Chamie.

I recognize Mr. Harris for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statements.

STATEMENT OF JAMES C. HARRIS, III, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, COUNTERING TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME, HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS

Mr. HARRIS. Good morning, Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Guest, Ranking Member McIver, and Ranking Member Ramirez, and esteemed Members. I appreciate the opportunity to present this vital topic here today.

It is an honor to represent the exceptional and unwavering efforts of the men and women of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations, who are steadfast in their commitment to protecting our Nation's security, public health, and economy from criminal organizations that seek to exploit and compromise our great Nation, border security, economy, and critical infrastructure. As a criminal investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, HSI is firmly dedicated to safeguarding the United States by detecting and dismantling transnational criminal organizations that threaten our citizens, businesses, and financial institutions. HSI has a formidable work force of approximately 8,800 personnel across 243 domestic locations and over 93 international sites. We leverage the expertise of more than 4,500 task force officers from diverse Federal, State, Tribal, territorial, local, and international agencies.

Our special agents are on the front lines identifying, intercepting, and prosecuting those who exploit our maritime borders and supply chains. We work in tandem with U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the U.S. Coast Guard to execute this vital mission. Every successful interdiction enables us to leverage our investigative prowess to trace supply sources, target distribution hubs, and disrupt financial networks with the goal of dismantling the entire transnational criminal organization.

It's important to emphasize that narcotics and dangerous drugs are not the only contraband we confront in a maritime environment. Given that most cargo entering the United States arrive by

sea, HSI routinely faces challenges from counterfeit and mis-manifested cargo, which can devastate public safety and the economy if allowed to enter our commerce.

Furthermore, maritime human smuggling poses a serious threat to national security and human life. With smugglers exploiting vulnerabilities along our maritime borders, they frequently utilize overcrowded, unseaworthy vessels that endanger the lives of migrants, with many being women and children. Through our border enforcement security task forces and transnational criminal investigative units, HSI is relentlessly targeting criminal networks in the maritime domain.

Globally, HSI leads 115 border enforcement security task forces across the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, engaging over 1,500 task force officers and personnel from more than 200 Federal, State, local, Tribal, international law enforcement agencies. Additionally, we have over 600 foreign law enforcement officers and prosecutors assigned to 18 transnational criminal investigative units and 3 international task force units, magnifying our capacity to disrupt criminal activity and defend our homeland.

Executive Order 14159, signed by President Donald Trump on January 20, 2025, directs the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Attorney General to establish Homeland Security task forces in every State and U.S. territory. These task forces, spearheaded by HSI and the Federal Bureau Investigation, are empowered to investigate, prosecute, and dismantle criminal cartels, foreign gangs, and transnational criminal organizations operating within the United States, with particular focus on 8 newly-designated foreign terrorist organizations. The HSTFs represent a united Government effort to target the most dangerous and prolific transnational criminal organizations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and for your on-going support of HSI in our relentless pursuit to safeguard America and its citizens by disrupting and dismantling transnational criminal organizations globally. I'm standing by for any questions you may have. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Harris follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES C. HARRIS, III

JUNE 10, 2025

Chairman Gimenez, Chairman Guest, Ranking Member McIver, Ranking Member Correa, and distinguished Members of the subcommittees, on behalf of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), we wish to express our appreciation to you for inviting us to this hearing today as well as for your time, attention, and steadfast commitment to protecting our homeland security through your service in your respective committees.

I also thank you for the opportunity to discuss the exceptional and exhaustive efforts the men and women of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations perform to safeguard our Nation's security, public health, and economy against those criminals who seek to exploit, victimize, and compromise our great Nation, our industries, and our critical infrastructure. I am truly honored to represent their exemplary service to our Nation, which is proudly conducted in accordance with the principles of Honor, Service, and Integrity.

ICE HOMELAND SECURITY INVESTIGATIONS HISTORY AND ROLE

As one of our country's premier Federal law enforcement agencies, Homeland Security Investigations stands dedicated to protecting the United States through detecting and dismantling Transnational Criminal Organizations targeting the American people, threatening our businesses, abusing our financial institutions, and exploiting our prosperity. With our unique authorities and footprint, Homeland Security Investigations is perfectly situated to investigate and dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations through the enforcement of over 400 Federal laws. At Homeland Security Investigations, we are comprised of approximately 8,800 personnel across 243 domestic locations and more than 90 international locations, where we leverage more than 4,500 task force officers from various Federal, State, Tribal, territorial, local, and international partners. Homeland Security Investigation's mission, as the principal investigative component of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is to combat a wide range of transnational crimes, including terrorism, illicit drug trafficking, human trafficking, child exploitation, human smuggling, and cyber crimes.

Under the Trump administration, Homeland Security Investigations aggressively pursues investigations into criminal networks and activities which compromise the global supply chain. A key focus among these investigative efforts resides within the maritime environment. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Maritime Administration, "about 99 percent of overseas trade enters or leaves the U.S. by ship. This waterborne cargo and associated activity contribute more than $500 billion dollars to the U.S. GDP, generates over $200 billion in annual port sector Federal/State/local taxes and sustains over 10 million jobs."[1] This vast amount of cargo movement allows Transnational Criminal Organizations the ability to exploit the global supply chain to smuggle contraband into the United States and around the globe.

Homeland Security Investigations works to identify, intercept, and eventually prosecute those exploiting maritime transportation and cargo supply chains. We utilize critical industry, open source, and law enforcement data, along with collaboration and information sharing among other Federal, State, local, and international law enforcement agencies, to identify highly-effective information to support criminal and civil investigations and enforcement activities primarily focused on the smuggling of illicit narcotics, such as fentanyl and precursor chemicals, weapons, sensitive U.S. military equipment, and dual-use technology, and the prevention of human smuggling, human trafficking, and drug trafficking.

Illegal drug smuggling is a global crime with local impacts. Illegal drugs—such as cocaine, methamphetamine, and synthetic opioids including fentanyl—largely come from other countries. Drug cartels and other Transnational Criminal Organizations employ complex schemes to evade detection as they attempt to smuggle their deadly products into the United States. Once here, local networks distribute and sell those drugs in our cities and on our streets—to our communities, our fellow citizens, and our loved ones—with devastating effects. In fiscal year 2025 alone, HSI investigations are credited with the seizure of over 501,036 lbs. of cocaine, 192,225 lbs. of precursor chemicals, 7,897 firearms, and the arrest of over 23,972 individuals.

Homeland Security Investigations fights daily to stem this terrible threat. Thanks to our efforts and those of our colleagues within DHS, illegal border crossings at the U.S. Southern Border are at a historic low. This has caused fentanyl seizures at our Ports of Entry to continue to fall. And as DHS personnel tighten border security at our land borders—cartels will continue to look for new ways to smuggle contraband and people into the United States, including through maritime means.

To combat those who seek to exploit our maritime environment, Homeland Security Investigations special agents work closely with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and the U.S. Coast Guard through interdiction and investigative efforts. With every successful interdiction—we leverage our expertise in conducting complex criminal investigations to identify the sources of supply, target the distribution hubs, and intercept financial networks to degrade and dismantle the entire transnational criminal organization.

As just one example of Homeland Security Investigation's prioritization of maritime investigations and our commitment to partnerships, Homeland Security Investigations is a steadfast partner in the Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force's Panama Express Strike Force. This prime example of a successful multi-agency operation is comprised of 7 signatory partner agencies. Additionally, Panama

[1] U.S. DOT Maritime Administration updated February 21, 2025 *(https://www.maritime.dot.gov/outreach/maritime-transportation-system-mts/maritime-transportation-system-mts).*

Express Strike Force collaborates closely with the U.S. Department of Defense's Southern Command Joint Interagency Task Force—South.

As an intelligence-driven, criminal enterprise combatting strike force, Panama Express Strike Force personnel have created and maintained one of law enforcement's most robust, productive, and reliable human intelligence networks ever operated in Central and South America. The daily collection, analysis, and dissemination of highly actionable intelligence targets Transnational Criminal Organizations linked to designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations. This intelligence also identifies operators involved in large-scale drug trafficking, money laundering, and related activities, primarily using maritime and air transportation conveyances.

The cycle of human intelligence employed by Panama Express Strike Force identifies Transnational Criminal Organizations operating in the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean, disrupts their operations through maritime and air interdictions, develops witnesses and intelligence, and dismantles the Transnational Criminal Organizations through strategic utilization of all developed evidence. This approach has produced historical law enforcement results.

It is important to note that drugs are not the only forms of contraband encountered in the maritime environment. Most of the cargo entering the United States from foreign countries arrives via maritime vessels. As such, Homeland Security Investigations routinely encounters counterfeit and mis-manifested cargo, which, if allowed to enter the commerce of the United States, can have devastating impacts on public safety and the U.S. economy.

Additionally, maritime human smuggling continues to pose a serious threat to both national security and human life. Human smugglers routinely exploit vulnerabilities along the United States' maritime borders, often utilizing overcrowded and unseaworthy vessels that place migrants, many of them women and children, at significant risk. These operations are frequently organized by Transnational Criminal Organizations operating off the coasts of California, Florida, and U.S. territories in the Caribbean. Homeland Security Investigations prioritizes the investigation of high-impact smuggling organizations through 2 key initiatives: Joint Task Force Alpha and the Extraterritorial Criminal Travel program. In coordination with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Department of Justice Criminal Division, Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section, and other law enforcement partners, these programs focus on dedicating investigative, analytical, and prosecutorial resources to dismantle the highest priority of human smuggling organizations and their affiliated networks.

A recent example underscores the heartbreaking human cost of these Transnational Criminal Organizations. On May 5, 2025, a panga-style vessel carrying 16 migrants, including 2 minors, capsized and washed ashore near Torrey Pines, San Diego. Rescue efforts managed to identify 6 survivors but tragically, 3 Indian nationals lost their lives and 7 others remain missing. Homeland Security Investigations is currently investigating this smuggling event.

During this investigation, as with our other investigations, Homeland Security Investigations targets every aspect of the criminal enterprise, from the recruiters and transporters to the organizers, financiers, and ultimately the leaders. This may include tracing the illicit funds used to purchase vessels, the freezing or forfeiture of connected bank accounts, the tracking of complicit commercial vessels, or the interceptions of communication devices.

These techniques, along with many others, are often most notably deployed through Homeland Security Investigation's capitalization of our unique authorities to employ a multi-layered strategy that integrates intelligence, operational coordination, and international cooperation within the task-force methodology. Traditionally exemplified through our Border Enforcement Security Task Forces units, and our Transnational Criminal Investigative Units, Homeland Security Investigations task forces bring together Federal, State, local, and international partners to target criminal networks along U.S. coastlines, among other threat areas. Additionally, we rely on U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations, and the U.S. Navy, to ensure the rapid response capability and maritime intelligence sharing. Globally, there are 115 Border Enforcement Security Task Forces units located across the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, comprised of more than 1,500 task force officers and personnel representing more than 200 Federal, State, local, Tribal, and international law enforcement agencies, and National Guard units. There are over 600 foreign law enforcement officers and prosecutors assigned to 14 Transnational Criminal Investigative Units and 3 International Task Force units operating in 17 countries worldwide. Together, these partnerships exponentially multiply Homeland Security Investigation's ability to affect investigative outcomes, disrupt criminal activity, and protect the homeland and our allies.

Building upon these 2 highly-successful programs, under Executive Order 14159, signed by President Trump on January 20, 2025, Homeland Security Investigation and partners from the U.S. Department of Justice have taken steps to establish Homeland Security Task Forces, in all States and U.S. territories. Homeland Security Task Forces are charged with investigating, prosecuting, and removing criminal cartels, foreign gangs, and Transnational Criminal Organizations operating in the United States. Homeland Security Task Forces coordination of activities comes through a national coordination center in collaboration with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, other Federal law enforcement partners, U.S. Attorney's Offices, and relevant State, Tribal, territorial, and local law enforcement agencies. Each Homeland Security Task Force targets the most prolific Foreign Terrorist Organization targets. The Homeland Security Task Force network aligns with Executive Orders 14159 and 14157 and is focused on dismantling cross-border human smuggling and human trafficking networks, especially those involving children, and enforcing U.S. immigration laws.

CONCLUSION

Maritime security is especially challenging as the U.S. Government must protect over 12,400 miles of maritime borders. Transnational Criminal Organizations constantly probe maritime borders for gaps to smuggle people, hundreds of thousands of pounds of illegal narcotics, dangerous weapons, illicit proceeds, and other contraband into the United States. Homeland Security Investigations uses this challenge to embody the dedication and service the American people expect and deserve. Our employees strive daily to achieve our mission and to ensure the safety and security of this great Nation, its people, and its economic prosperity.

Chairman Guest, Chairman Gimenez, and esteemed committee Members, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and for your continued support of Homeland Security Investigations and our efforts to safeguard America and its people by disrupting and dismantling Transnational Criminal Organizations throughout the world. On behalf of the men and women of Homeland Security Investigations, I would like to extend an invitation to the Members of both committees and their staff to visit our various facilities and engage with personnel from our headquarters components located here in the National Capitol Region as well as our domestic and international offices to garner first-hand knowledge of Homeland Security Investigations' operations and the diverse array of challenges we continuously face.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Mr. Harris.

I recognize Ms. MacLeod for 5 minutes to summarize her opening statements.

STATEMENT OF HEATHER MACLEOD, DIRECTOR OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND JUSTICE, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Ms. MACLEOD. Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member McIver, Ranking Member Ramirez, and Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here to discuss GAO's work on Federal efforts to counter illicit maritime activities. My testimony today focuses on actions that DHS components could take to help ensure U.S. maritime border security.

The illegal movement of people, drugs, and weapons into the United States and the criminal organizations that traffic them pose significant threats to national security. Securing the Nation's borders is a key part of the Department of Homeland Security's mission. Within DHS, Coast Guard, CBP, and HSI, law enforcement efforts are vital to confronting and mitigating illicit maritime activity.

In addition to their typical missions, these agencies, in coordination with other Federal partners, also respond to national priorities or emergencies. For example, in recent years, Coast Guard and

other Federal agencies were called on to respond to an unprecedented migrant surge at the Southern Border. This response impacted other missions. For example, during the surge, Coast Guard almost entirely redirected assets from its drug to migrant interdiction mission. Whether shifting priorities or surging to respond to a crisis or emergency, there is an impact on mission balance, assets, and personnel tied to these Federal efforts. Resources surged to respond to a crisis are not available for other missions, and people and assets can become stretched.

Additionally, GAO has identified coordination and operational challenges that may hinder these efforts. For example, we examined DHS task forces that coordinate to detect and monitor the trafficking of illicit drugs being smuggled on noncommercial maritime vessels, mainly on southern borders. Our work in 2019 and 2024 has shown that task forces have not consistently assessed their efforts. This is essential for making decisions about priorities and resource allocations. We have 7 recommendations pertaining to task forces that remain unaddressed.

Illicit maritime activities also occur in the Arctic region, including potential conflict with Russia or China or illegal fishing. The Coast Guard plays a key role in Arctic policy implementation and enforcement, but we found in August 2024 that the service does not have a way to measure progress on its Arctic efforts.

Our prior work has also found the Coast Guard faces significant operational challenges balancing tradeoffs among its assets and personnel across missions. As Coast Guard prioritized deploying assets for its migrant interdiction in recent years, it conducted fewer drug interdiction operations. Other missions were similarly impacted. The conditions of the assets the Coast Guard manages for all of its missions have been in a state of decline for decades. Our work has shown that the cost of maintaining these assets is increasing at the same time that their availability is decreasing. Declining availability of these assets and delays in acquisition of their replacements can affect Coast Guard's ability to conduct missions. Our recommendations address how Coast Guard can better manage asset challenges and acquisition programs for new vessels and aircraft.

DHS law enforcement components also face personnel challenges. The Coast Guard exceeded its recruiting goal in 2024 for the first time in 5 years by taking actions such as increasing recruiting offices, marketing, and outreach efforts. Despite these efforts, the Coast Guard remained about 2,600 enlisted members short of its work force target. CBP has also fallen short of staffing targets for its law enforcement position in recent years. In September 2024, we reported that CBP has taken action to strengthen its recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts. For example, each of CBP's operational components have offered recruitment incentives for law enforcement positions.

In conclusion, while DHS and its components play a vital role in confronting and mitigating illicit maritime activities, it faces challenges in carrying out these missions effectively. Actions are needed to ensure effective oversight and management of assets and personnel. Addressing our open recommendations in these areas will help ensure that the Department and its components are operating

effectively and efficiently, using available resources to carry out these missions.

This completes my prepared statement, and I'd be pleased to respond to any questions you may have at this time.

[The prepared statement of Ms. McLeod follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HEATHER MACLEOD

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2025

GAO HIGHLIGHTS

Highlights of GAO–25–108525, a testimony to the Subcommittee on Border Security and Enforcement and the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives.

Why GAO Did This Study

Securing the Nation's borders against unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs and other contraband, and terrorist activities is a key part of DHS's mission. While there is increased attention to the southwest land border, criminal organizations continue to use maritime routes to smuggle people, drugs, and weapons into the United States.

The U.S. Government has identified transnational and domestic criminal organizations trafficking and smuggling illicit drugs as a significant threat to the public, law enforcement, and national security. In March 2021, GAO added national efforts to prevent, respond to, and recover from drug misuse to its High-Risk List.

This statement discusses (1) key DHS resources to counter illicit maritime activities and (2) DHS operational challenges related to its efforts to counter illicit maritime activities. This statement is based primarily on 15 GAO reports published from July 2012 to April 2025.

What GAO Recommends

In prior work GAO made dozens of recommendations in the reports covered by this statement, including 23 to DHS. DHS generally agreed with the recommendations. As of May 2025, 4 of the recommendations have been implemented. GAO continues to monitor the agency's progress in implementing open recommendations.

MARITIME SECURITY.—ACTIONS NEEDED TO ADDRESS COORDINATION AND OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES HINDERING FEDERAL EFFORTS

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employs assets—including aircraft and vessels—and personnel across the United States and abroad to secure U.S. borders, support criminal investigations, and ensure maritime security and safety. Relevant DHS components include the Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations.

In prior work, GAO identified coordination challenges that hinder U.S. efforts to confront illicit maritime activities and recommended actions to improve oversight, measure effectiveness, and build organizational capacity. For example:

- In March 2025, GAO found that Homeland Security Investigations had not fully implemented certain training requirements due to disagreements over training content with the Drug Enforcement Administration, with whom they coordinate. Without doing so, the agencies cannot ensure that their agents are properly trained to collaborate effectively on counternarcotics investigations.
- In February 2024, GAO found that DHS had not developed targets for its coordinated efforts to combat complex threats like drug smuggling and terrorism—limiting its ability to assess the effectiveness of its efforts.
- In April 2024, GAO found that the Coast Guard had not assessed the type and number of helicopters it requires to meet its mission demands, as part of an analysis of its assets. Doing so could help ensure it has the necessary aircraft capability to execute its missions in the coming decades.

Coast Guard Cocaine Seizure in the Caribbean Sea, September 2023



Source: U.S. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Santiago Gomez. | GAO-25-108525

DHS components and their law enforcement missions are vital to confronting and mitigating illicit maritime activities. Addressing GAO's recommendations on setting targets and managing assets and personnel will help ensure that DHS efficiently uses its available resources to carry out its law enforcement missions to protect our maritime borders.

Chairmen Guest and Gimenez, Ranking Members Correa and McIver, and Members of the Subcommittees:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss Federal efforts to confront illicit maritime activities and challenges. Securing the Nation's borders against unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs and other contraband, and terrorist activities is a key part of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) mission. While there is increased attention on the southwest land border, criminal organizations continue to use maritime routes to smuggle people, drugs, and weapons into the United States.

The U.S. Government has identified trafficking of illicit drugs as a significant threat to the public, law enforcement, and national security. Use of these illicit drugs continues to impact tens of thousands of Americans each year. For example, provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention show about 80,000 drug overdose deaths during the 12-month period ending in December 2024.[1]

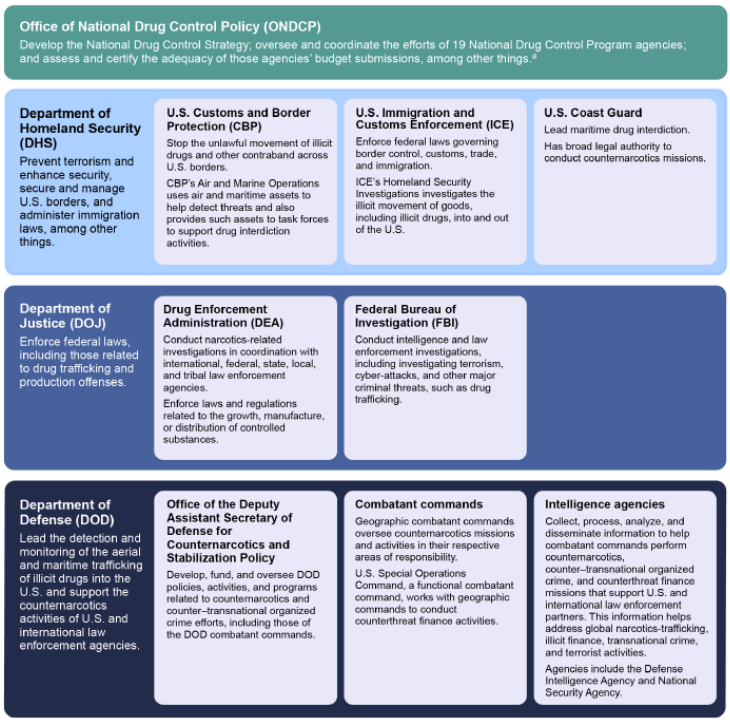
As shown in figure 1, multiple Federal departments and agencies coordinate on efforts to counter illicit maritime activities. Among them is DHS, which is responsible for, among other things, securing U.S. borders to prevent illegal activity while facilitating legitimate trade and travel.[2]

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[1] According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, reported provisional counts for 12-month ending periods are the number of deaths received and processed for the 12-month period ending in the month indicated. Drug overdose deaths are often initially reported with no cause of death (pending investigation) because they require lengthy investigation, including toxicology testing. As a result, reported provisional counts may not include all deaths that occurred during a given time and are subject to change.

[2] The Department of Defense (DOD) is the single lead agency responsible for detecting and monitoring the aerial and maritime transport of illegal drugs like cocaine and fentanyl into the United States. 10 U.S.C. § 124.

Figure 1: Selected Federal Departments and Components with Counter Drug Missions and Activities



Source: GAO summary of information provided by the entities listed. | GAO-25-108525

The Coast Guard is a multi-mission, maritime military service within DHS. The Coast Guard describes itself as the lead Federal maritime law enforcement agency and the only agency with both the authority and capability to enforce national and international law on the high seas, outer continental shelf, and inward from the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone to inland waters.[3] Coast Guard responsibilities include detecting and interdicting contraband and illegal drug traffic; at sea enforcement of U.S. immigration laws and policies; enforcing our Nation's fisheries and marine protected areas laws and regulations; and other missions.[4] It coordinates with DOD in joint task forces to carry out its drug interdiction mission.[5] In particular, the Coast Guard is a major contributor of vessels and aircraft deployed to disrupt the flow of illicit drugs.[6]

The Coast Guard shares maritime law enforcement responsibilities with other DHS components, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Air and Marine Operations and U.S. Border Patrol, while U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) investigates the illicit move-

[3] The term exclusive economic zone refers to an area up to 200 nautical miles from the territorial sea baseline where a country has sovereign rights to natural resources such as fishing and energy production.

[4] See 6 U.S.C. § 468.

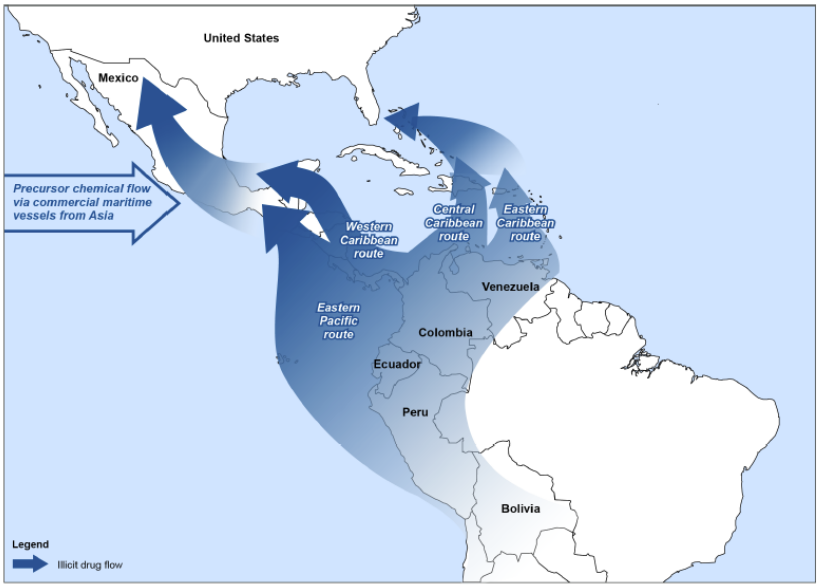
[5] 10 U.S.C. § 124 designates DOD as the single lead agency of the Federal Government for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States. The Coast Guard, within DHS, is the lead Federal agency for interdiction of maritime drug smugglers in international waters. This is because the Coast Guard may make inquiries, examinations, inspections, searches, seizures, and arrests upon the high seas and waters over which the United States has jurisdiction to prevent, detect, and suppress violations of U.S. laws. See 14 U.S.C. § 522.

[6] Coast Guard aviation and vessel assets include a fleet of about 200 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, about 250 cutters, and more than 1,600 boats. GAO, *Coast Guard: Aircraft Fleet and Aviation Workforce Assessments Needed,* GAO–24–106374 (Washington, DC: Apr. 9, 2024).

ment of goods, including counternarcotics investigations, among other responsibilities.

According to the Coast Guard, in fiscal year 2023, the agency intercepted more than 212,000 pounds of cocaine and 54,000 pounds of marijuana.[7] According to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the majority of the cocaine shipped to the United States. travels on maritime routes from South America and through the eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea.[8] Additionally, precursor chemicals may be shipped from Asia to Mexico, sometimes as legitimate commerce, where they may be combined into fentanyl or other controlled substances.[9] Figure 2 shows maritime and land routes for precursor chemical and illicit drug smuggling.

Figure 2: Maritime and Land Routes for Precursor Chemical and Illicit Drug Smuggling



Source: U.S. Coast Guard based on the Consolidated Counterdrug Database; Map Resources (Map). | GAO-25-108525

Note: Precursor chemicals are chemicals or substances that may be intended for illicit drug production.

The U.S. Government has identified illicit drugs, as well as the transnational and domestic criminal organizations that traffic and smuggle them, as significant threats to the public, law enforcement, and the national security of the United States. Further, given challenges the Federal Government faces in responding to the drug misuse crisis, in March 2021, we added national efforts to prevent, respond to, and recover from drug misuse to our High-Risk List.[10] Specifically, we identified

[7] Admiral Linda L. Fagan, Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard, *The Coast Guard's Fiscal Year 2025 Budget Request,* testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, 118th Cong., 2d sess., May 23, 2024.

[8] Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), *2020 National Drug Threat Assessment,* DEA–DCT–DIR–008–21 (March 2021). The majority of known maritime drug flow is conveyed via non-commercial vessels through the Western Hemisphere Transit Zone—a 6-million-square-mile area of routes drug smugglers use to transport illicit drugs that includes the eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, among other areas. See GAO, *Coast Guard: Resources Provided for Drug Interdiction Operations in the Transit Zone, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands,* GAO–14–527 (Washington, DC: Jun. 16, 2014).

[9] Precursor chemicals are chemicals or substances that may be intended for illicit drug production.

[10] See GAO, *High-Risk Series: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, GAO–21–119SP (Washington, DC: Mar. 2, 2021). We issue an update to the High-Risk List every 2 years at the start of each new session of Congress. The most recent update was issued in February 2025. See GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could*

Continued

several challenges with the Federal Government's response to drug misuse, such as the need for more effective implementation and monitoring, and related on-going efforts to address the issue, including law enforcement and drug interdiction.

My statement today discusses: (1) key DHS resources to counter illicit maritime activities and (2) DHS operational challenges related to its efforts to counter illicit maritime activities. This statement is based primarily on 15 GAO reports published from July 2012 to April 2025. For the reports we cite in this statement, among other methodologies, we analyzed DOD, DHS, CBP, and Coast Guard policy, documentation, and data, and interviewed officials from agency headquarters and selected field units. More detailed information on our scope and methodology can be found in the reports we cite in this statement.

For this statement, we reviewed information on the status of agency implementation of selected recommendations through May 2025. In addition, we reviewed Coast Guard budget and performance documents since 2018 to determine the extent the service reported meeting its drug interdiction performance goals from fiscal years 2014 through 2024. We also analyzed Coast Guard operational hour data for each of its 11 statutory missions, from fiscal years 2015 through 2024. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable to report Coast Guard operational hours for aircraft and vessels by statutory mission. To determine the Coast Guard's operating expenses, we reviewed the service's Mission Cost Model operating expense estimates for its 11 statutory missions. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable to report Coast Guard operating expense estimates for its statutory missions.

We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted Government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

DHS DEPLOYS AIRCRAFT, VESSELS, AND PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS ILLICIT MARITIME ACTIVITIES

Coast Guard Resources

DHS employs assets—including aircraft and vessels—and personnel across the United States and abroad to secure U.S. borders, support criminal investigations, and ensure maritime security and safety. Relevant DHS components include the Coast Guard, CBP, and HSI. Their air and marine missions vary depending on operating location.[11]

The Coast Guard is responsible for conducting 11 statutory missions, 3 of which are maritime law enforcement missions codified as homeland security missions—drug interdiction, migrant interdiction, and other law enforcement (which includes preventing illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing). In some cases, the Coast Guard coordinates its law enforcement missions with interagency partners.

The Coast Guard operates a fleet of about 200 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, with more than 1,600 boats and 250 cutters.[12] As of fiscal year 2024, it employs approximately 55,500 personnel—including active duty, reserve, and civilian.[13] In addition, the Coast Guard's shore infrastructure is comprised of nearly 40,000 assets, which consist of various types of buildings and structures.[14] For example, within its shore operations asset line, the Coast Guard maintains over 200 stations along U.S. coasts and inland waterways to carry out its search-and-rescue operations, as well as other missions, such as maritime security.[15] Figure 3 shows Coast Guard operating locations across the country, as of September 2020.

Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness, GAO–25–107743 (Washington, DC: Feb. 25, 2025).

[11] Coast Guard and CBP also coordinate on the deployment and allocation of assets and specialized personnel with the DOD to reduce the availability of illicit drugs by countering the flow of such drugs into the United States.

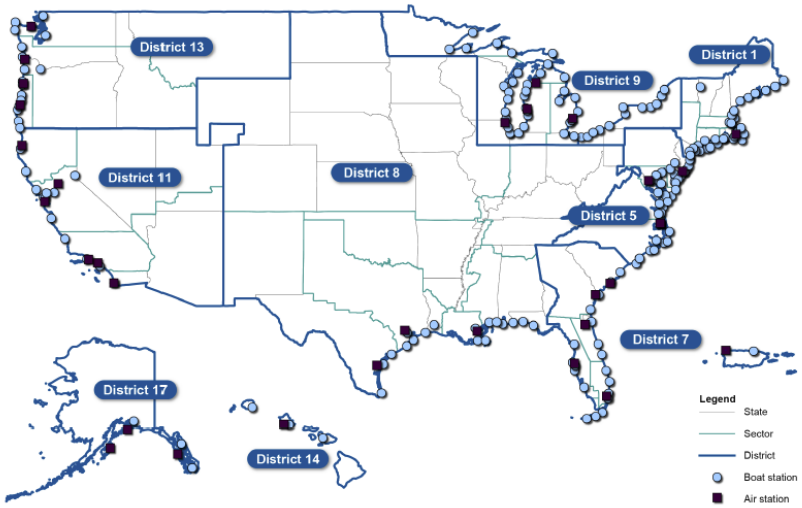
[12] GAO–24–106374 and GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Address Persistent Challenges Hindering Efforts to Counter Illicit Maritime Drug Smuggling,* GAO–24–107785 (Washington, DC: Sept. 19, 2024).

[13] GAO, *Coast Guard: Enhanced Data and Planning Could Help Address Service Member Retention Issues,* GAO–25–107869 (Washington, DC: Apr. 23, 2025).

[14] GAO, *Coast Guard Shore Infrastructure: More Than $7 Billion Reportedly Needed to Address Deteriorating Assets,* GAO–25–107851 (Washington, DC: Feb. 25, 2025).

[15] GAO, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Better Manage Shore Infrastructure,* GAO–22–105513 (Washington, DC: Nov. 16, 2021).

Figure 3: U.S. Coast Guard Air and Marine Operating Locations by District, as of September 2020

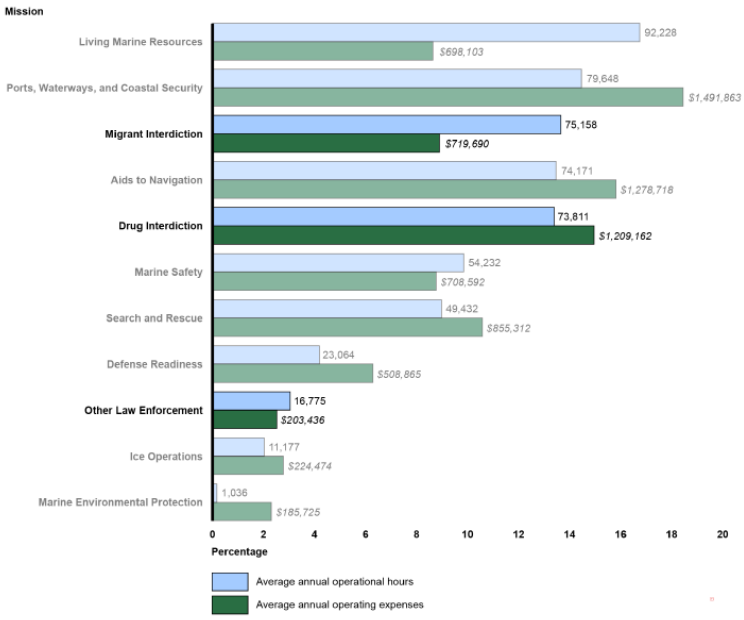


Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security information; U.S. Census Bureau (state boundaries). | GAO-25-108525

Note: Boat stations shown above also include small boat stations. Air stations shown above also include air facilities. The district numbers are not consecutive because some districts were consolidated to reflect the U.S. Coast Guard's operational reorganizations since its creation in 1915.

Our analysis of Coast Guard data showed more than a quarter of its total estimated operating expenses were for law enforcement missions related to homeland security. Specifically, from fiscal years 2015 through 2024, drug interdiction accounted for 15 percent of its average estimated operating expenses, migrant interdiction 9 percent, and other law enforcement (which includes preventing illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing) 3 percent. Figure 4 shows that the operating expenses of these 3 missions annually averaged more than $2.1 billion over this period.

Figure 4: Coast Guard Average Annual Vessel and Aircraft Operational Hours and Average Estimated Operating Expenses (in thousands), by Statutory Mission, Fiscal Years 2015 through 2024



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data. | GAO-25-108525

CBP Resources

Within CBP, Air and Marine Operations and Border Patrol are the uniformed law enforcement arms responsible for securing U.S. borders between ports of entry in the air, land, and maritime environments.[16]

CBP's Air and Marine Operations operates a fleet of 250 fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft and about 300 vessels to secure U.S. borders, as of March 2023.[17] The majority of CBP's Air and Marine Operations' activities support its law enforcement mission, including providing surveillance capabilities to detect and support the interdiction of illicit cross-border activity.[18] For example, in May 2023, CBP Air and Marine Operations personnel and Puerto Rico police forces seized over 4,000 pounds of cocaine found inside a vessel that landed on the southeastern coast of Puerto Rico. In addition, as of March 2024, CBP's Border Patrol operates over 100 vessels along the coastal waterways of the United States and Puerto Rico and interior waterways common to the United States and Canada.[19]

In September 2024 we reported on staffing levels for CBP law enforcement positions, including for Air and Marine Operations and Border Patrol.[20] We found that staffing levels for Air and Marine Operations positions varied from fiscal year 2018

[16] CBP's Office of Field Operations also has border security responsibilities, such as inspecting pedestrians, passengers, and cargo—including international mail and express cargo—at the more than 320 air, land, and sea ports of entry.

[17] CBP Air and Marine Operations owns and maintains CBP's 290 vessels, including riverine vessels that are operated by the U.S. Border Patrol, as of March 2023. Jonathan P. Miller, Executive Director of Operations, Air and Marine Operations, CBP, *Securing America's Maritime Border: Challenges and Solutions for U.S. National Security,* testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security, 118th Cong., 1st sess., March 23, 2023.

[18] GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Assessment of Air and Marine Operating Locations Should Include Comparable Costs across All DHS Marine Operations,* GAO–20–663 (Washington, DC: Sept. 24, 2020).

[19] "Border Patrol Overview," CBP, last modified: Mar. 4, 2024, *https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/overview.*

[20] GAO, *U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Efforts to Improve Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Law Enforcement Personnel,* GAO–24–107029 (Washington, DC: Sept. 25, 2024).

through the first half of fiscal year 2024. In particular, staffing levels for the Air Interdiction Agent position generally decreased and staffing levels for Aviation Enforcement Agents and Marine Interdiction Agents generally increased during this period. Regarding Border Patrol, we found that it met its staffing targets from fiscal years 2018 through 2020 but fell short from fiscal year 2021 through the second quarter of fiscal year 2024. Figure 5 shows CBP's Air and Marine Operations field structure, which is divided into 3 regions—northern, southeast, and southwest—and operating locations in these regions.

Figure 5: Air and Martine Operations Air and Marine Operating Locations by Region, as of September 2020



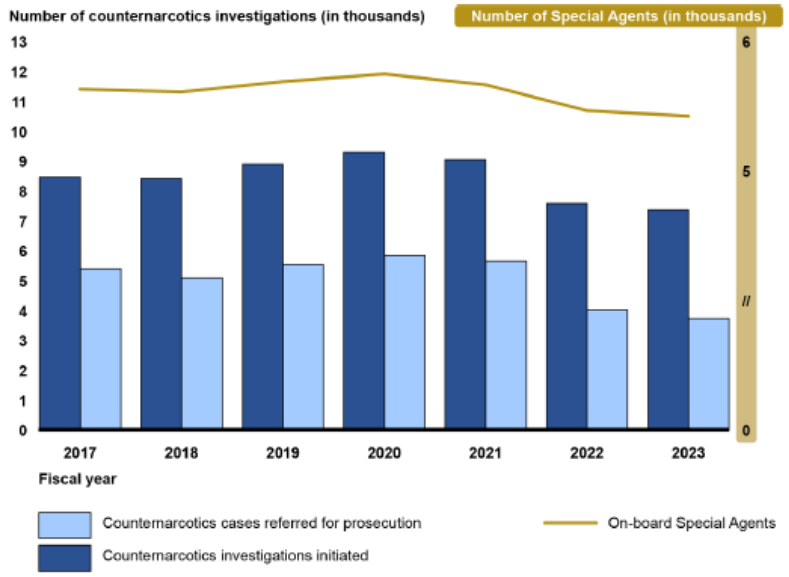
Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security information; U.S. Census Bureau (state boundaries). | GAO-25-108525

HSI Resources

HSI agents conduct Federal criminal investigations into the illegal movement of people, goods, money, contraband, weapons, and sensitive technology into, out of, and through the United States, including narcotics. Specifically, as it relates to counternarcotics investigations, HSI's mission includes tracking, intercepting, investigating, and stopping illicit narcotics from flowing into the United States through targeting criminal networks; strengthening global partnerships; and enhancing domestic collaboration. HSI is also involved in countering other illicit maritime activity. For example, in November 2024, HSI, in coordination with the Coast Guard and other Federal agencies, investigated the Gulf Cartel's involvement in criminal activities associated with illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, human smuggling, and narcotics trafficking in the maritime environment. Illegal fishing is often a revenue stream for criminal organizations, according to HSI, and is also a threat to U.S. maritime security, as criminal organizations may use the same vessels for smuggling narcotics and humans across borders.

As shown in figure 6, over a 7-year period—fiscal years 2017 through 2023—HSI initiated over 58,000 counternarcotics investigations and referred over 35,000 counternarcotics cases for prosecution (an annual average of over 8,000 initiated investigations and over 5,000 cases referred for prosecution). During this period, HSI was annually staffed with about 5,600 special agents working on HSI's law enforcement activities, including activities that work to combat illicit drugs in the United States.

Figure 6: Number of HSI Counternarcotics Investigations, Cases Referred for Prosecution, and Special Agents in Its Workforce, Fiscal Years 2017 through 2023



Source: GAO analysis of reported U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) information. | GAO-25-108525

COORDINATION CHALLENGES

Combating the trafficking of illicit drugs and other illicit maritime activities is a Government-wide priority that requires a coordinated effort by Federal departments and agencies. In prior work, we have identified coordination challenges that hinder U.S. efforts to confront illicit maritime activities and recommended actions to improve oversight, measure effectiveness, and build organizational capacity.

Improve oversight.—DOD and DHS lead and operate certain task forces—Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF)–South, JIATF–West, and DHS Joint Task Force–East.[21] For example, DHS components, including the Coast Guard and CBP, coordinate with DOD on counterdrug missions through the Joint Interagency Task Force–South. For example, the task force is allocated assets, such as ships and surveillance aircraft, from DOD and DHS components, such as the Coast Guard, as well as from foreign partners. The task force coordinates these assets, in conjunction with available intelligence, to detect and monitor the trafficking of illicit drugs, such as cocaine, being smuggled north on noncommercial maritime vessels across its area of responsibility.

In 2019, we reported that the task forces generally coordinated effectively using means that aligned with leading practices.[22] These included working groups and liaison officers, which helped to minimize duplication of missions and activities. However, our recent work has shown that these task forces and DOD should improve coordination and assess their efforts.[23] In 2024, we made 4 recommendations to im-

[21] An additional task force—Joint Task Force–North—consists solely of DOD personnel and does not generally operate in the maritime domain.

[22] See GAO, *Drug Control: Certain DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities,* GAO–19–441 (Washington, DC: Jul. 9, 2019). As established, the DHS task forces aimed to, among other things, combat terrorism threats, the smuggling of illicit drugs, unlawful migration, and other security concerns along the Southern Border and approaches to the United States.

[23] GAO, *Counternarcotics: DOD Should Improve Coordination and Assessment of Its Activities,* GAO–24–106281 (Washington, DC: Apr. 16, 2024) and *Department of Homeland Security: Additional Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Joint Task Forces,* GAO–24–106855 (Washington, DC: Feb. 7, 2024).

prove agencies' assessment efforts, including 2 recommendations to DHS to improve oversight of Joint Task Force–East. DHS agreed with the recommendations, which remain open as of May 2025.[24] Fully implementing them is essential for making decisions about priorities, resource allocations, and strategies for improvements.

Measure effectiveness.—The Coast Guard and DOD also collaborate to combat illicit maritime activities and mitigate risks in the Arctic region. According to the Coast Guard's Arctic Strategy these risks range from increased militarization of the Arctic region and potential conflict with Russia or China, to the increased risk posed by greater shipping traffic, and potential damage to the marine ecosystem from illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Officials from the Coast Guard and DOD also told us they collaborate in several ways, including sharing relevant information and expertise, providing operational assistance and conducting joint exercises in the region. Further, they reported collaborating on the development of their respective Arctic strategies. However, we found in August 2024 that the Coast Guard's Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan generally does not include mechanisms to measure progress on its Arctic efforts. This may make it difficult for the Coast Guard to plan activities, determine resource needs, assess its progress toward strategic objectives, and ensure its efforts are aligned with national efforts. As a result, we recommended that the Coast Guard include performance measures with associated targets and time frames in its implementation plan. The Coast Guard concurred with our recommendation, and we continue to monitor its progress.[25]

Build collaborative capacity through training.—While HSI agents may obtain Title 21 authority in order to collaborate with DEA on certain investigations of illicit activities, interagency disagreement on training has hindered effectiveness.[26]

In March 2025, we made 3 recommendations, including that DEA and ICE develop and implement the training.[27] Without jointly developing and implementing the training modules, DEA and HSI cannot ensure that their agents are properly trained to collaborate effectively with each other on counternarcotics investigations.

Operational Challenges

DHS assets, such as aircraft and vessels, and Federal personnel are vital to confronting and mitigating illicit maritime activities. However, our prior work has found that the Coast Guard faces significant operational challenges balancing tradeoffs among its assets and personnel across its 11 statutory missions where more work needs to be done. By comparison, CBP has strategically addressed certain operational challenges, such as recruitment and retention, through incentive pay.

Coast Guard tradeoffs.—The Coast Guard faces challenges balancing its varied mission priorities which have grown as it is called on to do more with its resources. In particular, in recent years, the Coast Guard has prioritized deploying its assets for its migrant interdiction mission. In doing so, it has reduced its operational activities to support other missions. The Coast Guard has not met its annual primary drug interdiction mission performance target in any year from fiscal years 2014 through 2024. Most notably, from fiscal years 2021 through 2023, the Coast Guard increased its migrant interdiction operations considerably in response to the highest maritime migration levels in the Caribbean in nearly 30 years. This tradeoff further challenges the Coast Guard's ability to meet its drug interdiction mission demands.

As shown in figure 7, from fiscal years 2021 through 2023, the Coast Guard increased its operational hours for aircraft and vessels by 66 percent for its migrant interdiction mission, while decreasing its deployments for drug interdiction by 62 percent.[28]

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[24] GAO–24–106855. DHS agreed with the 2 recommendations and identified on-going and planned steps to address them. Actions include plans to review its performance measures for the task force and document the methodology used calculate such measures, including performance targets. See also GAO–24–106281.

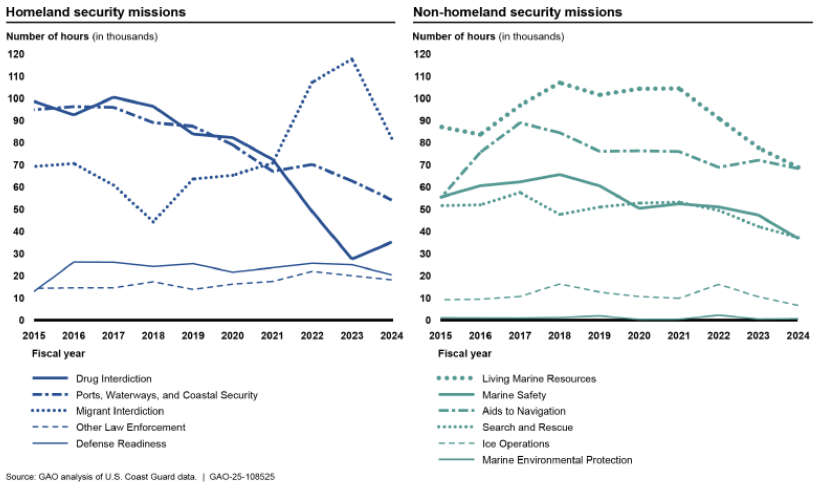
[25] GAO, *Coast Guard: Complete Performance and Operational Data Would Better Clarify Arctic Resource Needs,* GAO–24–106491 (Washington, DC: Aug. 13, 2024).

[26] Under section 873 of Title 21 of the U.S. Code, DEA can cross-designate HSI agents with the authority to investigate the smuggling of controlled substances across U.S. international borders or through ports of entry.

[27] See GAO, *Combatting Illicit Drugs: Improvements Needed for Coordinating Federal Investigations,* GAO–25–107839 (Washington, DC: Mar. 5, 2025). The agencies agreed with our recommendations. DHS described planned actions to address the recommendation to HSI, stating that HSI plans to work with DEA to develop and implement training modules.

[28] From fiscal years 2023 through 2024, Coast Guard resources deployed to support its migrant interdiction mission decreased, while Coast Guard resources deployed to support its drug interdiction mission remained at relatively low levels.

Figure 7: Coast Guard Aircraft and Vessel Resources Deployed to Homeland Security Missions and Non-Homeland Security Missions, Fiscal Years 2015 through 2024



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data. | GAO-25-108525

Coast Guard assets.—Moreover, the condition of the assets the Coast Guard manages have been in a state of decline for decades. Our work has shown that the Coast Guard's aircraft and vessels have faced readiness and availability challenges in carrying out their statutory missions.

For example, the Coast Guard relies on its Medium Endurance Cutters for its drug interdiction mission. However, we reported in July 2012 that Medium Endurance Cutters did not meet operational hours targets from fiscal years 2005 through 2011 and that declining operational capacity hindered mission performance.[29] In June 2023, we reported that Medium Endurance Cutters were not consistently meeting operational availability targets, and the Coast Guard noted that the declining physical condition of the cutters puts them at significant risk of decreased capability for meeting mission requirements.[30]

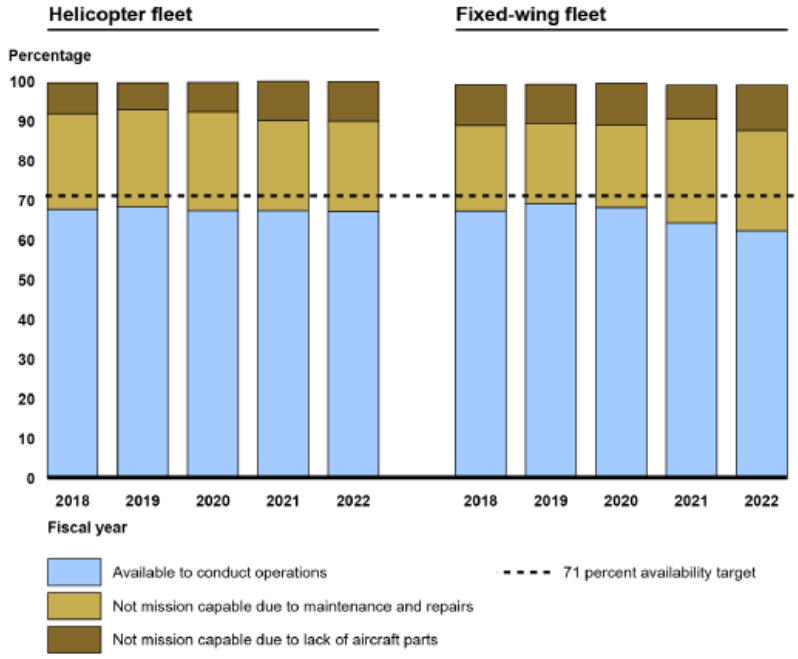
The Coast Guard's asset readiness challenges are not limited to its cutters. In April 2024, we reported that the Coast Guard's aircraft generally did not meet the Coast Guard's 71 percent availability target during fiscal years 2018 through 2022, as shown in figure 8.[31]

[29] GAO, *Coast Guard: Legacy Vessels' Declining Conditions Reinforce Need for More Realistic Operational Targets,* GAO–12–741 (Washington, DC: Jul. 31, 2012).

[30] GAO, *Coast Guard Acquisitions: Offshore Patrol Cutter Program Needs to Mature Technology and Design,* GAO–23–105805 (Washington, DC: Jun. 20, 2023).

[31] GAO–24–106374. GAO found that the Coast Guard had not assessed the type and number of helicopters it requires to meet its mission demands, as part of an analysis of its assets, among other things.

Figure 8: Coast Guard Helicopter and Fixed-wing Fleet Availability, Fiscal Years 2018 through 2022



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Coast Guard data. | GAO-25-108525

Coast Guard personnel.—Compounding deteriorating assets is a shortage of personnel to operate them. The Coast Guard exceeded its recruiting goal in fiscal year 2024 for the first time in 5 years by taking actions such as increasing recruiting offices, marketing, and outreach efforts. It also revised enlistment eligibility standards and took steps to address a significant increase in medical waiver requests in recent years. However, despite these efforts, the Coast Guard remained about 2,600 enlisted members short of its workforce target.

The Coast Guard has taken steps to address its retention challenges through monetary and nonmonetary incentives and in 2022 began to require service members to complete a career survey to help identify key issues affecting retention. However, survey response rates have been consistently low. In April 2025, we recommended that the Coast Guard take actions to address response rates and develop a clear plan to gauge the performance of its initiatives.[32] The Coast Guard agreed with our recommendations, and we will monitor their implementation.

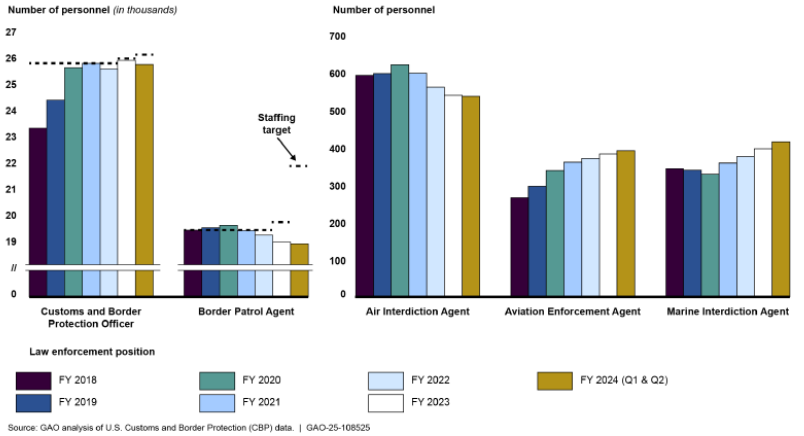
CBP personnel.—We reported in September 2024 that in recent years, CBP has also generally fallen short of staffing targets for its law enforcement positions, as shown in figure 9.[33] We also reported that CBP has taken action to strengthen its recruitment, hiring, and retention efforts. For example, each of CBP's operational components—the Office of Field Operations, U.S. Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations—have offered recruitment incentives for law enforcement positions.

In particular, in 2024 Border Patrol offered recruitment incentives of $20,000 per recipient, with an additional $10,000 for recipients stationed in remote locations. CBP has also offered retention incentives, relocation incentives, and special salary rates as part of its efforts to improve retention of law enforcement personnel. For example, Air and Marine Operations has offered retention incentives for positions and locations experiencing high rates of attrition. CBP anticipates a steep increase in attrition rates across all positions starting in 2027 because a significant number

[32] GAO–25–107869.
[33] GAO–24–107029.

of its law enforcement personnel will become eligible to retire. CBP has a strategic plan to address this expected retirement surge, and retention- and morale-related efforts will be increasingly important to help mitigate the loss of these personnel.

Figure 9: Target versus Actual Staffing Levels for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Law Enforcement Positions, Fiscal Year 2018 through the Second Quarter of Fiscal Year 2024



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data. | GAO-25-108525

Note: The Office of Field Operations determines staffing targets for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officers by assessing available funding, statutory provisions, current staffing levels, and projected attrition. Border Patrol's staffing targets are determined by authorized staffing levels that represent the number of agents supported by the component's appropriations, informed by provisions of explanatory statements and other legislative documents accompanying annual appropriations. Executive Order 13767, which was in effect from January 2017 to January 2021, called for CBP to hire 5,000 additional Border Patrol Agents, subject to available appropriations. According to CBP officials, CBP was not appropriated funding to hire an additional 5,000 agents; therefore, they are not included in Border Patrol's staffing targets. Air and Marine Operations does not have staffing targets for its three law enforcement positions. Fiscal year 2024 staffing levels are as of the end of the second quarter of the fiscal year.

In summary, DHS components and their law enforcement missions are vital to confronting and mitigating illicit maritime activities. Addressing our recommendations on setting performance measures and targets and managing assets and personnel will help ensure that DHS efficiently uses its available resources to carry out its law enforcement missions to protect our maritime borders.

Chairmen Guest and Gimenez, Ranking Members Correa and McIver, and Members of the subcommittees, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

APPENDIX I: RELATED OPEN RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY AS OF MAY 2025

Coast Guard: Enhanced Data and Planning Could Help Address Service Member Retention Issues, GAO–25–107869 (Washington, DC: Apr. 23, 2025).

- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Office of Workforce Requirements, Systems, and Analytics implements additional mechanisms to increase response rates for its Career Intention Survey.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Office of Workforce Requirements, Systems, and Analytics analyzes the potential for nonresponse bias in its Career Intention Survey results.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Talent Management Transformation Program Integration Office develops a clear plan, including how retention initiatives align with strategic objectives and timeframes and milestones for implementation, to track progress and gauge program performance.

Combatting Illicit Drugs: Improvements Needed for Coordinating Federal Investigations, GAO–25–107839 (Washington, DC: Mar. 5, 2025).

- *Recommendation*.—The director of ICE should work with the DEA administrator to develop and implement the 2 training modules in accordance with their January 2021 agreement, using agreed-upon dispute resolution mechanisms as appropriate.

Coast Guard: Complete Performance and Operational Data Would Better Clarify Arctic Resource Needs, GAO–24–106491 (Washington, DC: Aug. 13, 2024).

- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that District 17 collects and reports complete information about resource use and mission performance in accordance with Coast Guard guidance.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the Coast Guard's Arctic implementation plan includes performance measures with associated targets and time frames for the action items described in the plan in accordance with Coast Guard guidance.

Coast Guard: Aircraft Fleet and Aviation Workforce Assessments Needed, GAO–24–106374 (Washington, DC: Apr. 9, 2024).

- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should establish procedures requiring the Coast Guard to uniformly collect and maintain air station readiness data.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should establish a process to regularly evaluate Coast Guard-wide air station readiness data.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should assess the type of helicopters the Coast Guard requires to meet its mission demands, as part of an analysis of alternatives.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should assess the number of helicopters the Coast Guard requires to meet its mission demands, as part of a fleet mix analysis.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should assess and determine the aviation workforce levels it requires to meet its mission needs.

Department of Homeland Security: Additional Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Joint Task Forces, GAO–24–106855 (Washington, DC: Feb. 7, 2024).

- *Recommendation*.—The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure the Office of the Military Advisor develops and documents criteria for establishing a joint task force.
- *Recommendation*.—The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure the Office of the Military Advisor develops and documents criteria for terminating a joint task force.
- *Recommendation*.—The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure the Office of the Military Advisor, as it finalizes performance measures for Joint Task Force-East, establishes targets for those measures, as required.
- *Recommendation*.—The Secretary of Homeland Security should ensure the Office of the Military Advisor develops and documents the methodology used in establishing the performance measures for Joint Task Force–East.

Coast Guard Acquisitions: Offshore Patrol Cutter Program Needs to Mature Technology and Design, GAO–23–105805 (Washington, DC: Jun. 20, 2023).

- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that Offshore Patrol Cutter (OPC) program officials develop a technology maturation plan for the davit prior to builder's trials. This plan should identify potential courses of action to address davit technical immaturity, including assessing technology alternatives should the current davit continue to face development challenges, and a date by which the Coast Guard will make a go/no-go decision to pursue such a technology alternative.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that OPC program officials test an integrated prototype of the davit in a realistic environment prior to stage 1 builder's trials.
- *Recommendation*.—The Commandant of the Coast Guard should ensure that the OPC stage 2 program achieves a sufficiently stable design prior to the start of lead ship construction. In line with shipbuilding leading practices, sufficiently stable design includes 100 percent completion of basic and functional design, including routing of major distributive systems and transitive components that effect multiple zones of the ship.

RELATED GAO PRODUCTS

Coast Guard: Enhanced Data and Planning Could Help Address Service Member Retention Issues, GAO–25–107869 (Washington, DC: Apr. 23, 2025).

Combatting Illicit Drugs: Improvements Needed for Coordinating Federal Investigations, GAO–25–107839 (Washington, DC: Mar. 5, 2025).

Coast Guard Shore Infrastructure: More Than $7 Billion Reportedly Needed to Address Deteriorating Assets, GAO–25–107851 (Washington, DC: Feb. 25, 2025).

U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Efforts to Improve Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Law Enforcement Personnel, GAO–24–107029 (Washington, DC: Sept. 25, 2024).

Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Address Persistent Challenges Hindering Efforts to Counter Illicit Maritime Drug Smuggling, GAO–24–107785 (Washington, DC: Sept. 19, 2024).

Coast Guard: Complete Performance and Operational Data Would Better Clarify Arctic Resource Needs, GAO–24–106491 (Washington, DC: Aug. 13, 2024).

Counternarcotics: DOD Should Improve Coordination and Assessment of Its Activities, GAO–24–106281 (Washington, DC: Apr. 16, 2024).

Coast Guard: Aircraft Fleet and Aviation Workforce Assessments Needed, GAO–24–106374 (Washington, DC: Apr. 9, 2024).

Department of Homeland Security: Additional Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Joint Task Forces, GAO–24–106855 (Washington, DC: Feb. 7, 2024).

Coast Guard Acquisitions: Offshore Patrol Cutter Program Needs to Mature Technology and Design, GAO–23–105805 (Washington, DC: Jun. 20, 2023).

Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Better Manage Shore Infrastructure, GAO–22–105513 (Washington, DC: Nov. 16, 2021).

Department of Homeland Security: Assessment of Air and Marine Operating Locations Should Include Comparable Costs across All DHS Marine Operations, GAO–20–663 (Washington, DC: Sept. 24, 2020).

Drug Control: Certain DOD and DHS Joint Task Forces Should Enhance Their Performance Measures to Better Assess Counterdrug Activities, GAO–19–441 (Washington, DC: Jul. 9, 2019).

Coast Guard: Resources Provided for Drug Interdiction Operations in the Transit Zone, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, GAO–14–527 (Washington, DC: Jun. 16, 2014).

Coast Guard: Legacy Vessels' Declining Conditions Reinforce Need for More Realistic Operational Targets, GAO–12–741 (Washington, DC: Jul. 31, 2012).

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Ms. MacLeod.

Members will be recognized by order of seniority for their 5 minutes of questioning. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning.

I am going to go right to you, Ms. MacLeod. What I got from you is that the Coast Guard needs more ships and more people in order to carry out their missions because they are stretched thin right now. Pretty much?

Ms. MACLEOD. Yes. The Coast Guard has a history of making do. There are acquisition programs that are in place, but, as I mentioned, those are currently delayed. There are work force shortages across the Coast Guard. Although they met their recruiting goals, there remains a work force shortage.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you. Admiral Chamie, the reconciliation bill has how much more for the Coast Guard that will help, I guess, in this endeavor, try to give the Coast Guard the resources and the personnel it needs to carry out its mission?

Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, sir. We're grateful for the $21.2 billion in the House-passed reconciliation, sir.

Mr. GIMENEZ. You are confident that with that, and also the reconfiguring, reimagining of the Coast Guard, that the Coast Guard will be better able to carry out its mission in the future?

Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, sir. A combination of the reconciliation plus an increase in annual top line, that's critical for us to be able to get over some of the lingering issues, like shoreside infrastructure, the buildings that our crews operate out of.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Fair enough. Mr. Harris, the cartels. The cartels that—were the cartels the same cartels, are they involved both in drug trafficking and human trafficking?

Mr. HARRIS. Yes, the same cartels are involved in all those.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Is most of the human trafficking you are seeing, are they somehow paying the cartels in order to be trafficked or do you see people just ad hoc getting into a boat and trying to make it to the United States?

Mr. HARRIS. Both. Both. You see people going about it on their own, but you also see people utilizing transnational criminal organizations.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Are they the same cartels that were working on the Southern Border?

Mr. HARRIS. Yes, same cartels.

Mr. GIMENEZ. So they are now—they are in the Southern Border and they are also at sea. Are they Mexican in origin? Are they Colombian in origin? Where do they come from?

Mr. HARRIS. A lot of them are Mexico.

Mr. GIMENEZ. OK. But the cocaine is actually produced Colombia, Peru, you know, so—and it somehow gets to the Mexican cartels and they are the ones that distribute it? Is that the way that the operation works?

Mr. HARRIS. That is correct.

Mr. GIMENEZ. All right. During the Biden administration years, when we had thousands and thousands and millions of illegals crossing through the Southern Border, were most of those people paying the cartels to cross the border?

Mr. HARRIS. I don't think most of them. I think people were paying cartels, and people were doing it on their own through family, friends, or people in the community.

Mr. GIMENEZ. How much were the cartels making from the human trafficking during those years?

Mr. HARRIS. Investigations suggest that you can make a couple thousand per person.

Mr. GIMENEZ. So how much were they making? Were they—I mean, our estimation was they were making a billion dollars a month. Is that far off?

Mr. HARRIS. I'm not sure about that.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Fair enough. OK. So let's go now to China. The precursor drugs or chemicals are for fentanyl. What kind of success have we had in interdicting those precursor chemicals from reaching—I guess, it goes to Mexico, offloaded in Mexico? Then goes to the cartels who create the fentanyl and then ship it across the border. That fentanyl is killing Americans, is that right?

Mr. HARRIS. That is correct. We've had a lot of success in that area, seeing the chemical precursors coming from Asia to Mexico and then find its way into the United States.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Where's the success? I mean——

Mr. HARRIS. Success is the—we've decimated, at least in fiscal year 2025, I'll speak to that, in fiscal year 2025 we decimated 13 clandestine labs in Mexico that was ran by some of the cartels.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Yes, but those are the labs. I am talking about the ship that is coming with the chemicals from China. Do we interdict any of those at all or they all land in a Mexican port and then the chemicals are then shipped to the cartels?

Mr. HARRIS. No, we interdict those as well.

Mr. GIMENEZ. You do. But what percentage of that do you think you are interdicting?

Mr. HARRIS. I'm unaware. I can take that back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. OK. Well, would it surprise you if I tell you that the Chinese actually incentivize the companies that produce the precursor chemicals for fentanyl that kills tens of thousands of Americans? They incentivize them with tax breaks in China as long as they are for export, but they are actually illegal inside of China. So if they do that, would it lead you to believe that somehow this is done on purpose, that the Chinese are actually sending this stuff on purpose to kill Americans?

Mr. HARRIS. With China, they have been a good partner in this quest to stop the chemical precursors.

Mr. GIMENEZ. How can you say that when they are actually incentivizing the companies to create the chemicals that are only used for the creation of fentanyl?

Mr. HARRIS. We've had success working with them, the government of China, as well as Mexico, in trying to stop some of this.

Mr. GIMENEZ. In trying to stop them. We are not very successful at that, though, are we?

Mr. HARRIS. We've seen some success.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Fair enough. My time is up.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for her 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you so much, Chairman.

Admiral Chamie, in January, Trump and Secretary Noem ordered the Coast Guard to triple its presence at the U.S. Border. However, despite some of our requests, the Coast Guard has not provided us information on exactly where the service has redirected assets and personnel from. Would you please commit to providing us with the full accounting of all assets and personnel that have been redirected since January 20, including their home port or station, as well as a description of all deployments and missions that were canceled or redirected?

Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, Congresswoman. I'd be happy to come brief you on that.

Mrs. MCIVER. Perfect. Thank you so much.

I want to move to Ms. MacLeod. GAO has studied the Coast Guard's capabilities to carry out various missions, as well as its capacity to make resource allocation decisions effectively. In your estimation, does the Coast Guard fully understand the tradeoffs it is making when it redeploys assets and personnel?

Ms. MACLEOD. We've found both data limitations in acknowledging those tradeoffs, as well as strategic. Everything cannot be a priority. The Coast Guard, as I said, has a history of making do. Without accounting for the various tradeoffs among these 11 missions and various national priorities, it's a scattershot approach.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you. What are some of the tradeoffs the Coast Guard needs to reconsider?

Ms. MACLEOD. Well, among its missions, we saw in our recent data analysis as the Coast Guard has shifted more resources to the drug interdiction mission, a steep decline in the migrant interdiction mission, just as an example. Then there's the search-and-rescue missions and other missions that are also being affected at the same time.

Mrs. MCIVER. Got it. Thank you so much for that. Last year, GAO reported on the Coast Guard's aviation fleet and found that

the service's planes and helicopters were only available 66 to 68 percent of the time on average in recent years. Since then, the Trump administration started using Coast Guard planes, obviously to fly deportation staging flights. Secretary Noem requested to spend $50 million on a new executive Gulfstream jet.

Given the existing challenges the aging Coast Guard aircraft fleet faces, how do these additional demands impact Coast Guard readiness?

Ms. MACLEOD. The Coast Guard's aircraft are not meeting the availability target. Since our report last year, this has become even more acute with grounding of additional aircraft within the fleet.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you for that.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the Ranking Member McIver.

I now recognize the Chairman of the Border Security Enforcement, the gentleman from Mississippi, Michael Guest.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Admiral Chamie, I want to read a few headlines of some of the great work that the United States Coast Guard has done since just February of this year. "United States Coast Guard offloads more than 275 million worth of illegal cocaine in San Diego." That was February 13. March 6, "Coast Guard offloads over 141 million in illicit drugs interdicted in the Caribbean sea." That is from March the 6. "Coast Guard offloads over 517½ million in illicit drugs interdicted in Eastern Pacific Ocean," March the 20. "Coast Guard Cutter Calhoun offloads more than 140.9 million in illegal narcotics at Port Everglades," May 16. "Coast Guard offloads more than 211 million in illicit drugs interdicted in the Eastern Pacific," May 29 of this year. Then just earlier this month, on June the 6, "Coast Guard offloads more than 138 million in illicit drugs interdicted in the Caribbean Sea."

If my math is correct, that amount is roughly $1½ billion in narcotic seizures just this year. So to the men and women who serve under your command, I want to personally thank them for the job that they are doing.

I want to ask you briefly, Admiral, can you talk about the importance of interdicting these drugs at sea before these narcotics come into the United States? Also talk a little bit about the impact that $1½ billion in seizures has on these transnational criminal organizations.

Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, sir. Thank you, Chairman Guest, and thanks for your words complimenting our crews. Our commandant and the rest of our leadership team are very proud of them.

To your question, sir, what we try to do is interdict the drugs in bulk quantity as far away from the shores of the United States as we can. Because the closer these bulk amounts get to the United States, they get broken up into smaller amounts that make them easier to smuggle in. So you could have a large load of, say, 2 tons that goes into the Dominican Republic, gets broken into small packages of 3 or 4 kilos that could fit in a backpack, and then they get smuggled further north. So that's one way. So we want to get them as far away from the shores as we can.

The value in that is that those billions of dollars that you said, sir, that's the cash that fuels the cartel. So all of the other nefar-

ious activities that they're doing, human smuggling, weapons smuggling, sex trafficking, you name it, that cash fuels it. These are poly-crime organizations. They don't care what they're doing as long as it makes them money.

Mr. GUEST. Mr. Miller, kind-of want to dovetail off of that a little bit. You say in your written testimony on page 3, you talk about the authority to operate the extension of the 12 nautical miles in custom waters. You know, the admiral just spoke a little bit about the benefit of interdicting these narcotics or those individuals who are smuggling individuals in the country. The greater that you can extend that outside the United States border, the more opportunity you are going to have to be successful. So want to talk a little bit and ask you to please speak on that, about the importance of that extension to the 12 nautical miles.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you for your support in these efforts.

Yes, the Customs Waters Bill extending customs waters from 12 to 24 nautical miles, it modernizes customs law with the speed of vessels these days, increases the area that we could potentially patrol where we make interdictions and save lives. We've drafted this legislation in collaboration with the Coast Guard. It gives us interdiction parity at sea so we may better assist each other.

Mr. GUEST. If Congress were to grant you that authority, would that make our community safer by the fact that you would be able to have an expanded area in which you have law enforcement, that authority?

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Chairman. Yes, it would. It would increase our interdictions. Like the admiral said, identifying and interdicting these narcotics loads before they get closer to shore and break up into smaller loads. Also with human trafficking as well, the farther out we can identify these before they get close to highly-congested areas is easier to interdict.

Mr. GUEST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe I am out of time, so I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Chairman Guest.

I now recognize the Ranking Member of the Border Security and Enforcement, the gentlewoman from Illinois, Mrs. Ramirez.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Harris, you represent ICE's Homeland Security Investigations as the assistant director for countering transnational organized crime, correct?

Mr. HARRIS. That is correct.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Thank you. Mr. Harris, do you assess that Tren de Aragua is engaged in transnational organized crime? Yes or no?

Mr. HARRIS. Yes.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Harris, is HSI responsible for investigating Tren de Aragua, which includes collecting and providing intelligence about who is and is not a gang member for ICE enforcement and removal operations?

Mr. HARRIS. Yes, we do investigate Tren de Aragua.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. OK. Yes or no, are the tattoos part of that assessment?

Mr. HARRIS. It can be.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. OK. So I want to ask you a few questions. These are some real-life examples. If someone has a tattoo with hands praying, are they a gang member? Yes or no?

Mr. HARRIS. I have to know more about that——

Mrs. RAMIREZ. OK.

Mr. HARRIS [continuing]. Than just a tattoo.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. So let me ask you then another question. What about someone with an autism awareness tattoo? Are they a gang member?

Mr. HARRIS. I would have to know more about the situation.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. I would also agree with that. So let me ask you a question. What about a crown tattoo? Yes or no? A crown with a soccer ball.

Mr. HARRIS. Same thing. I would not—have to know more about the situation.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Harris, I am going to ask you again for the record here, what about a tattoo across their chest perhaps?

Mr. HARRIS. I'd have to know more about the situation.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Our Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, OK. Mr. Harris, are you aware of any instances in which relying on tattoos has resulted in wrongful ICE arrest or deportations? Are you aware?

Mr. HARRIS. I oversee transnational organized crime. As far as deportations or removals——

Mrs. RAMIREZ. You are not aware?

Mr. HARRIS [continuing]. I'm not.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Well, thank you, Mr. Harris. Well, according to several resources, including on occasion, the administration has demonstrated that they have not done enough research and investigation. In addition to Andry Hernandez Romero's wrong gang tattoos, they said, of his parents name with crowns, Neri Alvarado Borges had a colorful tattoo of an autism awareness ribbon for his 15-year-old brother. Jerce Reyes Barrios had a tattoo of a soccer ball with a crown, a tribute to the logo of his favorite soccer team, Rio Madrid from Spain. Like them, there were so many more. I just showed you a number of them.

DHS has wrongfully detained and deported immigrants and asylum seekers, all based on an arbitrary point system that DHS has created. They call it the Alien Enemy Validation Guide. Having a tattoo accounted for 4 points of the 8 needed deemed deportable. Their point system reflects a long legacy of using arbitrary criteria of predefined characteristics to be profile, criminalize, marginalize, and punish.

The HS tattoo system reflects the same racist, arbitrary, ignorant activities of this administration's forbearers. We make court decisions about the freedom of Black people based on hair. In *Hudgins* v. *Wright,* hair was determined to reveal Black identity more than skin color. We targeted children in indigenous communities who wore Native cultural attire and sent them to boarding schools. We said anyone with long hair in the 1960's was a radical and a communist. We identified gang members using baggy clothes, specific color combinations, and certain hat positioning in the 1990's.

You see over and over again, the Government has proven that it can't be trusted with expeditious systems of justice based on arbitrary criteria defined by bigoted assumptions about people. Each of these arbitrary systems end up reflecting the worst of our biases. That is the point this administration may revel in, but I for one, am not comfortable with sloppy, radicalized biases condemning people to a life in CECOT.

You see, we can have the Constitutional tool to do better. It is called due process. It is actually the only way to ensure that we minimize administrative errors and that arbitrary characteristics and bigoted assumptions do not ruin people's lives. It is why it is so important that when we are having these conversations in this committee that we understand that what we use to determine who we deport, who we don't, why we violate due process, when we violate due process, that it has real-life consequences and that our constituents, our children are watching.

The idea that they deported parents at a kindergarten graduation this past week is unconscionable. I want to make sure that I remind people of that.

With that, Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the Ranking Member.

I now recognize the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Crane, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the panelists for coming today. I know you guys came here to testify about maritime activities in U.S. waters. I also want to apologize to you guys for the rants you are hearing from my colleagues about anything but what you guys came here to testify. I also want to point out the fact that the hypocrisy and the insanity coming from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle who created this problem when it comes to the border invasion and now they are kicking and screaming that the Trump administration is actually trying to clean it up.

So now back to what we are here to talk about. Rear Admiral Chamie, last year, the U.S. Coast Guard intercepted a narco submarine in the Caribbean sea, seizing over 1,200 pounds of cocaine valued at more than 54 million. This semi-submersible vessel designed to evade detection is a stark reminder of the emergent sophisticated methods employed by drug cartels to infiltrate our border. My question to you, sir, is how many of these narco submarines has the Coast Guard encountered in the last 5 years?

Admiral CHAMIE. Good morning, Congressman. I'll have to get back to you on the exact number, but as you said, it is common. The cartels, the transnational criminal organizations, they get more sophisticated in the ways that they will try to smuggle drugs. So they use a variety of vessels, and one of those, as you said, is to use a submarine.

Mr. CRANE. Are they buying these submarines from other foreign states? Are they making them on their own? Do you have any intelligence on that?

Admiral CHAMIE. They typically build them themselves on land and then push them into the water.

Mr. CRANE. OK. Admiral, have you seen the cartels utilizing drones, either subsurface or aerial drones, out at sea?

Admiral CHAMIE. I have not seen them myself, but we are aware that the transnational criminal organizations do operate drones, and it also presents a threat to our crews at the land border.

Mr. CRANE. Admiral, what new technologies, unmanned underwater vehicles, sonar nets, or satellite tracking are being deployed to detect these types of narco submarines before they make it to our shores?

Admiral CHAMIE. So we're using a couple different types of technologies right now. One of them is an unmanned aircraft that we fly off our National Security cutter. We've been using the ScanEagle for some time. We're still operating that. Then we're starting to field a new vertical lift system called the V–BAT. What that enables us to do is get that up in the air for anywhere from 12 to 18 hours longer than we could typically fly a manned aircraft. These aircraft have sensors that provide us an increased ability to be able to detect what's on the water.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. Mr. Miller, in your opening testimony, you talked about the increase in maritime interdictions. Do you believe what you are seeing with the increase in maritime interdiction is due to the adaptation of smuggling routes by the cartels to circumvent the work that this administration has done to secure our Southern Border?

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Congressman. Yes, I do. We've certainly seen that in the Southern California AOR, where we've seen the biggest surge in maritime migrant smuggling activity. We suspect that's primarily due to the difficulty to be smuggled across the land border.

Mr. CRANE. OK, thank you. My next question is for the gentleman in uniform today. Have your organizations removed all DEI from training? I will start with you, Admiral.

Admiral CHAMIE. Yes, sir. We are in full compliance with the President's Executive Orders.

Mr. CRANE. Mr. Miller.

Mr. MILLER. Yes, to my knowledge, Congressman.

Mr. CRANE. Is anyone in your organization that you are aware of in violation of President Trump's Executive Order on eliminating DEI?

Mr. MILLER. Not that I'm aware of, Congressman.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. Ms. MacLeod, I want to go to you real quick. Your recent GAO report released on May 14 highlighted the Coast Guard's loss of more enlisted service members than it recruited from fiscal years 2019 to 2023, leading to a shortfall of approximately 2,600 enlisted personnel in fiscal year 2024. In your reporting, ma'am, and investigation, what was the major cause of the loss of enlisted sailors within the Coast Guard?

Ms. MACLEOD. We found a number of reasons, some of them having to do with work force challenges that the Coast Guard faces, such as the frequent moves, living in remote or in vacation areas that can be very high-cost, access to health care, you know, challenges with the missions, a range of reasons.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentleman yields back.

I recognize the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Carter.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses today.

I want to just build on a little bit what my dear friend Mr. Crane mentioned. Just real rapid response, real quickly. Do any of you feel that diversity has hurt your operations? Starting on the far end, sir.

Mr. MILLER. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. CARTER. Just a yes or no. Has diversity hurt your operations?

Mr. MILLER. No, Congressman.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you. Admiral.

Admiral CHAMIE. We're very proud of our diverse work force, sir.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you.

Mr. HARRIS. I second that. Very proud of our work.

Mr. CARTER. Ms. MacLeod.

Ms. MACLEOD. We also are very proud of our diverse work force at GAO.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you. So I just find it difficult when my colleagues on the other side of the aisle somehow demonize the word "diversity" as if it is a bad word, as if there is something wrong with having diversity, equity, or inclusion and creating a broad swath of opportunities for individuals of varied backgrounds. So I just wanted to put that the record that we have to stop demonizing diversity as if it is some kind of a bad word.

As a representative from New Orleans region, an area uniquely vulnerable to natural disasters and maritime disruptions, I want to stress how essential the Coast Guard is to our region's safety and economic strength. Rear Admiral, I want to personally thank you and the incredible work that the Coast Guard does in Louisiana, specifically. After Ida, you guys were instrumental. I can't say thank you enough for the incredible work of the men and women who were Johnny on the spot, who responded to the issues in the New Orleans region in the Louisiana region. So let me take this opportunity to say thank you to all of you for the incredible work that you do. We may not always agree on every single aspect of our discussions, but please know that the work that you do is appreciated.

The Mississippi River moves more than 500 million tons of cargo annually, supporting thousands of jobs and billions in economic activity. The Coast Guard ensures that this trade can flow safely and securely. From maintaining aids to navigation to responding to emergencies and inspecting vessels, the work maintains this engine of American commerce. A delay in reopening the river after a storm doesn't just affect Louisiana. It raises the prices and disrupts supply chains nationally.

In addition to relying on the Coast Guard for hurricane response and maintaining maritime commerce, the Coast Guard helps counter illegal, underreported, and underregulated fishing. Illegal international fishing undercuts U.S. fishermen, flooding the market with cheaper, untraceable, often unhealthy, sometimes through human trafficking and slave labor, undercutting our opportunities to provide resources to the world as our fisheries are the flow for the rest of the world. That is why we must be cautious about poli-

cies that shift or pull Coast Guard away from these core missions. Diverting personnel to other missions, this becomes a real issue.

Rear Admiral Adam Chamie, could you share with me how often do you use the NOAA forecasters to predict and to address storms that are coming or inclement weather on people that you may be out to save?

Admiral CHAMIE. Thank you, Congressman, and thanks for the kind words about our crews. We take great pride in responding to the hurricanes and being some of the first on scene.

So we partner with—across the interagency and across the Government to get our weather information. We don't get it from just one singular source. We monitor. We just started last week and we'll continue into the fall, till the end of hurricane season, to track storms when they first start forming close to Africa and in the South Caribbean, and make sure we're ready when they make landfall.

Mr. CARTER. If we don't have an NOAA, I understand that there are multiple outlets that are used, how does that impact you?

Admiral CHAMIE. Sir, we certainly find value in working with NOAA. I would just say that we'll continue to do the best we can.

Mr. CARTER. That is fair. Got it. We should always endeavor to give you more resources, not fewer.

Ms. MacLeod, according to GAO's research, what impacts can we expect the diversion of Coast Guard resources have on its efforts to affect hurricane response, countering illegal, underreported, and unregulated fishing? We are now in the middle of hurricane season, a time that arguably we should be giving you all the resources to protect life, property, and assets of the Federal Government, and most importantly of those most vulnerable people. I know that I am over. Can you quickly just share with us an answer to that?

Ms. MACLEOD. The Coast Guard uses its assets and people for multiple missions, so any focus that they're shifting to would take away from other priorities.

Mr. CARTER. Any mission——

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. CARTER [continuing]. Takes away from the priorities of the Coast Guard.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. CARTER. My time has expired. Thank you very much.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I now recognize the gentlewoman from South Carolina, Mrs. Biggs.

Mrs. BIGGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I would just like to start off personally thanking each of you for your role and your dedication to your jobs and your duty.

My first question is for Mr. Harris. What impact do sanctuary jurisdictions have on maritime import security? Do you feel that cracking down and enforcing the law on sanctuary jurisdictions would help secure our land as well as our maritime borders?

Mr. HARRIS. Well, HSI investigative entity, we enforce any violations of U.S. customs laws and U.S. immigration laws. The, you know, the border, the sanctuary cities, we haven't seen, you know, from HSI—well, from a criminal investigator point of view, we haven't really seen any issues in what we're doing on our job. We

have seen that on other parts of ICE enforcement removal operations, they're having some issues with enforcing some of their laws and in different jurisdictions.

Mrs. BIGGS. OK, thank you. So given that, and this question is also for you, given that an estimated 80 percent of fentanyl seized at the U.S. ports of entry between fiscal years 2019 and 2024 was trafficked by U.S. citizens, and considering President Trump's recent designation of certain cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, what concrete actions are being implemented against those found to be aiding, abetting, or directly working for these terrorist organizations?

Mr. HARRIS. It's the same thing that we've always done as far as investigating people or threats. You know, I said we investigate violations of U.S. customs law and U.S. immigration law, and we go after those people. Whether we interdict shipments along with our partners, we trace funds, you know, we trace illicit proceeds that these criminal organizations or these people acquire from contraband, we do that, and we all—you know, we arrest them and prosecute them. So we do exactly what we've always done.

Mrs. BIGGS. Thank you so much, Mr. Harris.

As a proud member of Border Security and Enforcement and Transportation and Maritime Security Subcommittees, I have seen first-hand the absolute necessity of fully equipping our Federal agencies with every tool that they need to secure our Nation. That is why I am introducing 2 vital pieces of legislation that directly confront the rampant involvement of U.S. citizens in cartel drug trafficking and the severe national security threats posed by radical sanctuary cities.

My first bill, the Mobilizing Against Sanctuary Cities Act, it is simple. No Federal taxpayer dollars will flow to jurisdictions that refuse to uphold American law. This empowers the Trump administration to restore law and order in places that have actively undermined our immigration system for decades. The recent events in Los Angeles are a perfect example of why we can't wait any longer. We have seen in real time the chaos that results when cities refuse to cooperate with Federal immigration enforcement.

We must also directly target the individuals who actively conspire with these cartels and terrorist groups. That is why I am also introducing the No Passport for Terrorists and Traffickers Act. It is critical legislation which will automatically revoke the passport of individuals found to be providing material support to these designated foreign terrorist organizations. By denying these individuals the ability to travel internationally, we strike a direct blow at their operational capacity and send an unmistakable message: if you choose to conspire with those who poison our Nation and threaten our security, you will lose the travel privileges of American citizenship.

This isn't just about policy debates. It is about the safety and security of everyday Americans, like in the Third District of South Carolina that I represent. This is why we can't wait any longer. I urge every one of my colleagues, anyone who believes in American sovereignty and the rule of law, to sponsor these vital bills. Let's stand united and send a clear message. We will put America first and we will secure our Nation.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the gentlewoman from South Carolina.

I now recognize the gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Johnson.

Ms. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Over the past 5 months, we have seen high school graduates, doctors, children, and U.S. citizens detained and deported. These mass deportation efforts in the name of making America safe is only instilling fear and causing confusion and chaos for our local law enforcement, ultimately putting our communities at risk for greater harm. While the Trump administration is using valuable resources for your taxpayer dollars to make unlawful and unnecessary arrests, we have seen no serious effort to actually address our Nation's border crisis or the rising threats from our adversaries.

If the Trump administration was serious about cracking down on the cartels and protecting our border, they wouldn't be cutting $495 million in funding and firing nearly 30 percent of the employees at CISA and our cybersecurity work force. They wouldn't be using resources from our U.S. Coast Guard to assist with their deportation efforts as our Coast Guard faces a lack of funding, overused aircrafts, where Acting Commandant Admiral Kevin Lunday openly stated, even though we can operate aircraft to the level we have, we should not be. We should be investing in new aircraft for the Coast Guard. They wouldn't be wasting time renaming the Gulf of Mexico and they wouldn't be deploying the U.S. military on U.S. citizens.

If they were serious about the real border crisis, they would be going after gun dealers in States like Texas and Arizona that account for almost 50 percent of international firearms trafficking involving the cartels. There seems to be a lot of discussion, very concerned about the cartels, lots of messaging about that, but there is actually no real effort being done to actually rein them in. They wouldn't be calling to cut 1.2 billion to ATF that would terminate agents who have to work undercover in the gun trafficking rings connected to the cartel. They would be strengthening our relationships with our allies and not threatening trade wars, and would be providing the resources needed for agencies to execute their mission.

President Trump said he was going after migrant criminals, illegal monsters, killers, and gang members. But yet we are wasting resources terrorizing communities by showing up masked at elementary school graduation ceremonies, work, and court hearings where people are presenting themselves to the immigration system to follow the rules, to go get their hearing, to have the right process. They are going to the courts of law. They are supposed to be safe places. Instead they are turning these sacred spaces into spaces of terror. It is absolutely outrageous.

Mr. Harris, we have seen a drastic increase of ICE arrests at court hearings. I am a lawyer. I value the sanctity of the courtroom and people go to attend an immigration hearing and they are presenting themselves to go through the process legally. I have continued to voice my significant concerns over how ICE agents present themselves in the public. But this administration is content with ignoring the concerns of Congress and the American people.

I recently asked Secretary Noem on this issue when she came in front of this very committee. Since that time, we have continued to see ICE agents dressed in plain clothes, wearing masks regularly, and not properly identified. When you are sitting on a street and some masked man jumps out of a car and isn't properly identified as law enforcement and comes running to you, that is not OK to me.

My question to you, sir, is it OK with you and what are you going to do about it?

Mr. HARRIS. Well, thank you for the question. We enforce, you know, any violation of U.S. immigration and customs laws. As far as the employees doing that at court hearings, I'm not of—you know, I know that it happens or it has happened. I'm not aware of the specific details of any of those matters. I would have to know more about that.

Ms. JOHNSON. Well, it is all over the news. Every time in Texas, just even in Dallas a couple weeks ago, there were like 15 people arrested at the immigration court. People who were going through the process legally, had filed the application, had an immigration hearing, were following the law, were not, you know, abject, horrible, dangerous criminals. These are people who are working, who are working in grocery stores, who are working in farms, who are working in gas stations, who are working in hotels, who are doing their part to contribute to our economy, and who are showing up for their immigration hearing, as they are required to do, and then being tackled in the hallway by unidentified agents who are not properly marked as law enforcement. That is within your agency's jurisdiction.

I want to know, this has been widely reported, what are y'all doing to stop that?

Mr. HARRIS. Again, I don't know the facts of that matter or the matters at the court hearing, so I can't speak general—or speak specifically on what's going on. But I will say with facial coverings and markings, they should have markings on. Facial covers, I believe, are reasonable right now for what's going on. The assaults that's taking place, the doxing that's taking place, that's a significant rise. The threats to family members, to employees, to loved ones. You know, they have to do that for officer safety reasons. Assaults are 400 percent—have increased 400 percent this year because of what's going on.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentlewoman's time has expired.

I want to thank the witnesses for their valuable testimony and the Members for their questions, especially the Chairman of the Border Security and Enforcement Subcommittee, Mr. Guest, and the Ranking Member Ramirez.

The Members of the subcommittees may have some additional questions for the witnesses, and we would ask the witnesses to respond to these in writing. Pursuant to committee rule VII(E), the hearing record will be open for 10 days.

Without objection, the subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:32 a.m., the subcommittees were adjourned.]

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