



## Message from the Executive Director, John Kanig

At the Puerto Rico / U.S Virgin Islands HIDTA we are always looking for ways to advance our mission and apprise policy makers. These past several months the PRVI HIDTA has hosted several important visitors.

These visits have provided our Executive Board members the opportunity to frame the operating environment we confront in our region, and showcase the hard work done by our law enforcement and public health professionals to mitigate these challenges. Our distinguished visitors included, Dr. Rahul Gupta, ONDCP Director, Shannon Kelly, National HIDTA Director, Thomas Padden, Acting Director OCDETF, Steven Dettelbach, Director of ATF and Major General Matthew Smith, Commander JTF-N. We thank them for their outstanding support.

On May 14, 2024, Deputy Director Doby briefed over 36 Police Commissioners who attended the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police conference in Belize, regarding the opioid threat in the eastern Caribbean. During the week of June 16th, our Overdose Response Strategy and Caribbean Corridor Strike Force initiatives briefed members of the National Alliance of State Drug Enforcement Agencies. This event was hosted by the Virgin Islands Police Department and allowed the participants to better understand the drug threat in the southeast border of the United States and how it effects other parts of our nation.

In closing, I want to thank our Executive Board members for their strong leadership and always supporting the PRVI HIDTA.



PR-USVI HIDTA 2nd Quarter 2024 Newsletter

## Drug Czar Dr. Rahul Gupta visits PRVI HIDTA

On May 21, 2024, the PRVI HIDTA hosted ONDCP Drug Czar Dr. Rahul Gupta for an interagency meeting at the HIDTA Office in San Juan PR. Members of the HIDTA Executive Board attended and participated in discussions regarding Prevention, drug trafficking trends, and current threats in the region. The Caribbean Corridor Strike Force group along with the AIRTAT briefed on operations, and our Drug Intelligence Officer briefed on some of the programs this HIDTA supports under the prevention umbrella. Dr. Gupta was given a tour of the HIDTA Office and had a chance to talk with various initiative members and agency heads.



Dr. Gupta discusses the opioid threat while seated next to PRVI HIDTA Board Chair Alexis Torres.



Director John Kanig seated next to HSI SAC Rebecca Torres during meeting.



Group photo with Dr. Gupta and Executive Board members.

## The Interdiction Committee (TIC) Convenes in Puerto Rico



Above: Executive Director John Kanig gives a presentation on PRVI HIDTA expansion plans.



Right: Leticia Loaiza and Shannon Kelly, National HIDTA Director.

On May 22, 2024, the PRVI HIDTA hosted a meeting with a US delegation from The Interdiction Committee (TIC) to include Ms. Shannon Kelly, National HIDTA Program Director, and Mr. Thomas Padden, Acting Director of OCDETF. This was an inter-agency discussion concerning the proposed expansion of the PRVI HIDTA to an OCDETF Strike Force. The PRVI HIDTA will be expanding operations to incorporate a CGIC Lab and to co-locate the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force and AIRTAT under one roof. The HIDTA facility currently houses the Puerto Rico Police Departments marine enforcement unit (FURA) (including their 24-hr. watch center), the ISC, the Training Initiative, the Puerto Rico's DIO and the PHA.

## LIAISON

### ATF Director Steven Dettelbach and his Delegation visit PRVI HIDTA

On May 1, 2024, HIDTA hosted a meeting with ATF Director Steven Dettelbach and his Executive Delegation in Puerto Rico. Dir. Kanig gave an overview of the PRVI HIDTA program and our efforts to combat the violence in the territory. ATF has a presence in St. Croix USVI as well as in Puerto Rico. They also discussed HIDTA expansion plans that include the establishment of a Crime Gun Investigation Center (CGIC) on site and how this new initiative will complement our efforts against gun violence in the region.



Dir. John Kanig and ATF Director Steven Dettelbach

## Virgin Islands Police Department Hosts the NASDEA Symposium

The National Alliance of State Drug Enforcement Agencies (NASDEA) held their "2024 NASDEA Spring Symposium" in St. Thomas, USVI on June 16 – 20th. The symposium was hosted by the Virgin Islands Police Department. In attendance were approximately 115 State, Federal, and Local LE partners from all across the US. This event marks the second time the USVI has hosted an international law enforcement conference, the first being the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP) in May of 2010. This was an extraordinary step forward in promoting global relationships for NASDEA and VIPD. Members of the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP) were also invited. This created a broad platform for networking and building international ties. Members of the PRVI HIDTA briefed on the ORS Strategy, Opioid Threats, and the HIDTA Program. Other agencies briefed on Artificial Intelligence concerns, illegal immigration, and other matters of concern to both the Caribbean borders as well as the CONUS.



DIO Rodney F. Querrard speaks at the NASDEA Symposium on the opioid threat and prevention efforts in the Caribbean.



From left to right: PR-USVI HIDTA Deputy Director James Doby, PR-USVI HIDTA, Drug Intelligence Officer Rodney F. Querrard, Acting VIPD Police Commissioner Mario Brooks, Denise Foster, SAC of DEA Caribbean Division, Derek Marltz, Executive Director, PenLink, Atlee Rodney, Commissioner of Police, Antigua & Barbuda, Donald Payton, Commander at Illinois State Police and NASDEA President, John Kanig, PRVI HIDTA Executive Director, and Sergeant Ludrick Thomas, Special Assistant to the Police Commissioner (VIPD).

## PR-USVI HIDTA Attends the ACCP Conference in Belize

On May 14, 2024, Deputy Director James Doby attended the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP) conference in Belize. This was the ACCP Annual General Meeting. Over 36 Police Commissioners from the Eastern Caribbean and Central American countries were in attendance. Deputy Director Doby conducted a briefing on the opioid threat in the Eastern Caribbean region, followed by DEA Chemist Emily Lockhart, who discussed identifying what opioids look like on the street, and the dangers of improperly handling them when collecting evidence.



Left: DEA Chemist Emily Lockhart speaks about the opioid dangers of opioids before the ACCP delegation.



Right: Association Of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP) members attending their Annual General Meeting and Conference 2024 in Belize City, Belize.

## Mayor of Guaynabo, PR Visits HIDTA



On May 29, 2024, Executive Director John Kanig hosted a meeting with the Hon. Mayor Edward O'Neill, City of Guaynabo, PR, along with HSI SAC Rebecca Gonzalez. Dir. Kanig gave a HIDTA 101 briefing detailing the function of each of our 17 initiatives. In addition, PHA Francisco Torres-Cardona gave an overview on ODMAP, detailing the protocols for logging in information and the benefits of understanding how the national overdose threat impacts the territories of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Also in attendance was TFO Coordinator Lt. Wilfredo Castillo and Guaynabo Municipal Police Lt. Wilfredo Martínez.

## Prevention Liaison

On Thursday, June 20, the PRVI HIDTA hosted a meeting between our Health and Prevention partners, and Will Plummer, Senior Director of DEA Compliance of Amneal Pharmaceuticals. The purpose of the meeting was to generate a conversation on avenues of procuring NARCAN for the region. DEA approached large private pharmaceutical companies earlier this year, and asked them to step up and do more to combat OD deaths where the help is most needed across the US. Over 13 Health partners from the USVI and Puerto Rico attended the meeting in person and on VTC. Amneal is also interested in helping some of our partners in the region who's municipalities are struggling financially.



Will Plummer addresses the PRVI EB Health and Prevention Members.

## PRVI HIDTA Prevention

### US Virgin Islands HIDTA Prevention Initiative

On April 18th, 2024, PHA Amulen Wirsiy and DIO Rodney F. Querrard travelled to St. Croix at the request of Ms. Kean Thompson-Slocombe on behalf of the Counseling Department at the St. Croix Educational Complex High School (SCECHS). That department was tasked to organize classroom presentations on the topics of "The Effects of Marijuana, Vaping, and the use of Edibles used by high school students". The target age group was ages 14-18 years. The requested format for presentations were short audio or visual video clips, lectures, and discussions. There was a total of 5 presentations given, each with between 73 and 75 students (and teachers), with a total number of approximately 350 students, teachers and counselors in attendance. The ORS team also had an opportunity to be in the breezeway outside of the lunchroom where students who did not take part in the presentation had an opportunity to ask questions and receive pamphlets on various topics including opioids, marijuana, edibles, peer pressure, among others.



Left: (left to right) DIO Rodney F. Querrard, SCECHS Counselor Kean Thompson Slocombe, SCECHS Assistant Principal Erick Willie, SCECHS Counselor Leana Timothy, PHA Amulen Wirsiy and SCECHS Counselor Arverille Maillard.

Right: DIO Rodney F. Querrard and PHA Amulen Wirsiy presenting at the St. Croix Educational Complex High School on the topics of Opioids, Vaping, Marijuana and Edibles.



## Overdose Response Strategy

### School Monitors Professional Development Retreat

From June 3rd to 5th, 2024, the US Virgin Islands Department of Education held a School Monitors Professional Development Retreat for School Monitors territory-wide on St. Thomas. Invited to speak at the retreat were representatives from various departments and agencies including the VI Police Department, Office of Gun Violence, New Mexico Tech, among others. Also invited to do three (3) one-hour presentations was DIO Rodney F. Querrard, on "The Dangers of Opioids and other Drugs in Our Schools and Communities". There was a total of 80 School Monitors in attendance.



The Monitors were very engaged in the conversation, and voiced their concerns about what they are seeing daily with some of the students at their schools. They requested that DIO Querrard be included in future Parent/Teacher Association meetings so attendees can at least be aware of the threats and challenges their children and students are facing every day.

## PRVI HIDTA PHA's and DIO's attend the RX Summit in Atlanta, GA

PR-USVI HIDTA PHA's Francisco Torres-Cardona and Amulen Wirsiy, along with DIO Rodney F. Querrard attended the 2024 RX and Illicit Drug Summit that was held in Atlanta, Georgia from April 1st to the 4th, 2024. There were approximately 3000 people in attendance including Public Safety and Health professionals. There were 90 educational sessions to choose from over the 4 days that focused into highly effective strategies for prevention, treatment, and recovery which one could apply insights gained immediately upon their return to the workplace. There were 9 specialized tracks spanning topics from overdose prevention and illicit drugs, to public safety and technology. Attendees could tailor their experience by choosing sessions that aligns closely with their professional interests. The collaboration and communication between attendees from all professional backgrounds is well worth the time to attend this important informational and educational summit.



Left: (left to right) PHA Francisco Torres-Cardona, PHA Amulen Wirsiy and DIO Rodney F. Querrard at the 2024 RX and Illicit Drug Summit, held in Atlanta, Georgia from April 1st - 4th.



Right: Plenary Session, 2024 RX and Illicit Drug Summit (approximately 3000 people in attendance).

## PRVI HIDTA DIO's and PHA's attend the ORS Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas

Public Health Analyst (PHA) Amulen Wirsiy and Francisco Torres-Cardona, along with Drug Intelligence Officers (DIO's) José Rodríguez and Rodney F. Querrard from the Puerto Rico-US Virgin Islands HIDTA and the CDC Foundation travelled to Dallas, Texas in May to participate in the 3-day 2024 Overdose Response Strategy (ORS) Conference which is held each year in different parts of the United States. These conferences are an important part of the Overdose Response Strategy (ORS) objectives. It brings all DIO's and PHA's from all participating states and territories together, along with ORS leadership and other groups who are part of the collaborative effort to bring awareness and reduce the number of overdoses and deaths as a result of the opioid crisis and other drug related health issues. There were approximately 300 participants at this year's conference. Invited guests, including "lived experience" individuals shared a wealth of information and real-life stories that had a resounding effect on all present. The first day was for all PHA's and DIO's only. This gave them the opportunity to share what each team is doing in their AOR, and was also a great way to meet and collaborate in person, rather than zoom or another platform.



Left: (left to right) PHA Francisco Torres-Cardona, (PR), DIO Rodney F. Querrard (USVI), PHA Amulen Wirsiy (USVI) and DIO José Rodríguez (PR) at the 2024 ORS Conference, Dallas Texas, May 2024.

Right: 2024 ORS Conference attendees, Dallas, Texas (approximately 300 people in attendance).





### Bayamón Pioneering through an ODMAP Application Programming Interface (API)

The Application Programming Interface (API) is a software connection that allows an agency's current record management system (RMS) to interact with ODMAP. Once overdose records are identified within RMS, data fields are collected, converted into the appropriate format, and pushed to ODMAP via the established API. Last May, the Disaster and Pre-Hospital Medicine (DIPHOM) Department from municipality of Bayamón, agreed to establish an API. This would bring greater data accuracy, near real time report, and less manpower in the overdose fatal and non-fatal events data collecting, including the Naloxone provision to victims. Starting as a suggestion to reduce the burden of entering suspected overdose events data twice, Drug Intelligence Officer (DIO) José O. Rodríguez and Public Health Analyst (PHA) Francisco Torres-Cardona provided information and assistance to the DIPHOM and their RMS vendor for the establishment of the API. The municipality of Bayamón have been using ODMAP for approximately four (4) years and is a grantee of the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP).

### Capacity Building Collaboration to Inform on Substance Use

On Friday, June 21st at the PR USVI HIDTA Training Initiative room, a group of 17 agents from the Puerto Rico Police Bureau's De Vuelta a la Vida (DVV) program attended a seminar titled Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). The purpose of the seminar was to inform public safety personnel about the effects of opioids -like morphine, heroin and fentanyl-, clinical diagnosis and treatments for patients with OUD from a biopsychosocial approach. This capacity building activity was coordinated by the ORS Puerto Rico team and provided by the Opioid Response Network (ORN), a program from the Institute of Research, Education and Services in Addiction (IRESA) at the Universidad Central de Caribe (UCC).

DVV's purpose is to support people who struggle with substance use and homelessness, coordinating access to health and social services, like treatment and transitional housing through referrals and coordinated services. Dr. Andrés E. Calvo-Díaz, internist with an addiction medicine subspeciality, shared his expertise and experience about psychoactive substance use.



### HIDTA ENFORCEMENT

#### Fajardo Major Organizations Investigation



On May 14, 2024, DEA HIDTA Fajardo TFG II agents, working in conjunction with USMS, arrested a DEA fugitive of over 11 years. Agents also seized a white 2020 Mercedes-Benz GLE 350. A K-9 subsequently discovered 549,700.00 USC within the vehicle and \$3,146.00 USC (official counts) found on the fugitives person. A total of \$552,846.00 USC was seized by the agents.



## **PONCE GRP 1**

Members of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Ponce District Office (DO) Task Force Group 1 (TF-1), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Ponce Office and Puerto Rico Police Bureau have recently made (13) arrests, seized over \$300,000 United States Currency (USC), approximately \$700,000 USC in assets, approximately (100) kgs of drugs, such as cocaine, heroin, marijuana and other drugs, and more than (20) firearms. Their target was involved in the recruiting and supplying drug mules in Ponce, PR that would utilize different airports to smuggle kilogram quantities of cocaine to the Continental United States (CONUS).



## Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF) seizes 6.2 metric tons of cocaine

Since March 2024, CCSF jointly with the Guyana Resident Office (GRO) agents worked together to locate a Self-Propelled Semi-Submersible (SPSS) transporting over two metric tons of cocaine. As a result of the coordination with JIATF-S, the USS LEYTE GULF was able to locate the SPSS 132 NM east of Trinidad and Tobago. USS LEYTE GULF seized 2300 kilograms of cocaine and arrested three individuals. The case was prosecuted in the District of Puerto Rico.



## AIRTAT Enforcement Operations

For this quarter Airtat agents seized 31 kilograms of cocaine and arrested two cocaine couriers. The interdictions being employed by AirTAT agents has significantly decreased the amount of cocaine that Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) attempted to pass through the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (LMMIA).





CCSF Agents seized a large cache of cocaine which subsequently led to the seizure of the weapons shown below.



CCSF agents executed a search warrant at the residence of the arrestee and seized 1 million dollars in cash, 32 luxury watches, multiple rifles and firearms, 50 kilograms of cocaine and multiple vehicles.



## HIDTA SAFE STREETS INITIATIVE CONDUCTS MAJOR ISLAND WIDE TAKE-DOWN

On February 2, 2021, ATF Task Force and PRPD Agents, initiated an investigation related to an Armed Drug Trafficking Organization (ADTO) that operated in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. The defendants in this case worked to distributed illegal drugs for significant financial gain and profit, including crack, heroin, cocaine, marijuana, Percocet, Xanax, and Tramadol all within 1,000 feet of the Ramón Marín Solá Public Housing Project (PHP), Trina Padilla de Sanz PHP, Manuel Zeno Gandía PHP, Bella Vista PHP, and La Meseta PHP. This organization was responsible for shootings, armed robberies, and narcotics distribution in Arecibo. Additionally, members of this organization exported and distributed narcotics to Florida, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. El Coto ADTO, though information from the PRPD Homicide Division, is also associated with 29 murders to include two massacres and two double homicides.

On 05/02/24, HIDTA ATF-Puerto Rico with the assistance from, CBP, DEA, HSI-SRT, USMS, IRS, and PRPD executed a series of sixty-three (63) Federal Arrest Warrants in Arecibo, PR, pursuant to a Federal Grand Jury Indictment in the District of Puerto Rico. Among the charges are:

- 18 USC 922(g)(1)-Possession of a Firearm by a Convicted Felon
- 18 USC 924(c)-Possession of a Firearm in Furtherance of a Federal Drug/Violent Crime
- 18 USC 1956-Money Laundering
- 21 USC 841-Narcotics-Possession with Intent to Distribute
- 21 USC 846-Narcotics-Conspiracy to Distribute
- 21 USC 856-Maintaining a Location for Narcotics Distribution

Our joint efforts underscore our unwavering commitment to dismantling criminal enterprises and safeguarding our communities.

