

# PR USVI HIDTA PARTNERS




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## In Memory

Executive Director Samuel Santana began his law enforcement career as a police officer in Dade County, Florida. In 1984 he joined the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) serving in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and the mainland cities of: Chicago and Washington DC. He also served in El Salvador, Central America. As a Special Agent he worked mostly under the Criminal and National Security branches.

In 2002 he was promoted to Assistant Special Agent in Charge, San Juan Field Office. In 2014, after almost 30 years with the FBI, he retired and was selected by the Executive Board to lead the PRVI HIDTA. As Executive Director, he maintained constant communication with all Federal, State and Local agencies responsible for taking action related to emergencies associated with law enforcement matters, worked with identifying training needs for the law enforcement and first responders' community, and supported all prevention efforts within the jurisdictions. He was admired by his colleagues and counterparts throughout the region. He will be missed.



Former Executive Director Samuel Santana  
August 3, 1958 – December 17, 2024

## Partner Profile



Rebecca C. González-Ramos  
Special Agent in Charge  
HSI San Juan

Mrs. Rebecca C. González-Ramos is currently the Special Agent in Charge for Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) San Juan, overseeing Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. HSI is the principal investigative component of the Department of Homeland Security. HSI investigates, disrupts, and dismantles transnational criminal organizations and terrorist networks that threaten or seek to exploit the customs and immigration laws of the United States. Before this assignment, she served as HSI San Juan's Acting Special Agent in Charge since October 2022. Previously, she was selected as the Deputy Special Agent in Charge in San Juan in June 2022. SAC González-Ramos returned to HSI San Juan in 2021 as an Assistant Special Agent in Charge, overseeing the Public Safety Group, the Puerto Rico Crimes Against Children Task Force and the Human Exploitation and Document Fraud Group.

Before returning to HSI San Juan, she was an ASAC in Fort Lauderdale overseeing all HSI operations in Broward County. Before arriving to HSI Miami, she was the Operations Chief in HSI Headquarters overseeing the Southwest Border. She dedicated most of her career to investigate crimes against children in which she was able to collaborate with the HSI Victim's Center Approach initiative, the launch of the internet safety I-Guardian outreach program and the development of international sextortion investigations at the national level. As the former Group Supervisor of the Child Exploitation Investigations Group in San Juan, Puerto Rico, González-Ramos was the driving force behind the creation of the Puerto Rico Crimes Against Children Task Force, established in June 2011. Through the task force, federal, local, and state law enforcement agencies pool their resources to jointly investigate crimes committed against children in Puerto Rico.

SAC González-Ramos is a native from San Juan, P.R., and graduated from the University of South Florida with a bachelor's degree in Communications. In 2010, she completed a Juris Doctor from the Interamerican School of Law in Puerto Rico. She currently lives in San Juan with her husband, who is a retired federal agent, and enjoys spending time with her three daughters, son and granddaughter.



## Retirement Celebrations



Left: Ms. Wallace and Deputy Director Doby. Right: Ms. Wallace and staff at St. Thomas HIDTA.



Congratulations to Ms. Hyacinth Wallace! Ms. Wallace retired from St. Thomas HIDTA on November 30, 2024 after 22 years of dedicated service. She served as the Office Receptionist as well as many other roles when called upon. She was always willing to help out with Prevention Initiative events, and loved interacting with the children. Ms. Wallace is a native of Antigua, but has lived in the US Virgin Islands for over 50 years. The St. Thomas HIDTA hosted a surprise Retirement Party for Ms. Wallace at the HIDTA office on November 22, 2024.

Congratulations to DEA SAC Denise Foster who retired after 24 years of dedicated service. SAC Foster joined DEA in 2002. She had a very successful career serving in Detroit, Colombia, and SOD. She was promoted to SAC of the Caribbean Division in 2022. SAC Foster was a valuable member of the HIDTA Executive Board, and great leader for the HIDTA organization. Executive Director John Kanig and Deputy Director James Doby presented SAC Foster with a plaque honoring her service at the Executive Board Meeting on December 12, 2024.



Above: SAC Foster addressing the Executive Board. Left: Deputy Director Doby, SAC Foster and Executive Director Kanig.

## LIAISON EVENTS

On December 9, 2024, Executive Director John Kanig and HIDTA partners hosted a law enforcement delegation from Chile at the HIDTA Office. The meeting was organized by the US Attorney's Office at the request of our Chilean partners. HIDTA partners demonstrated how to better organize their law enforcement efforts, and optimize the resources at their disposal. Chilean partners were particularly pleased with the HIDTA platform of sharing resources in a task force environment and discussed their plan to replicate this organizational strategy when they return to Chile.



Left: Chilean Delegation listening to the HIDTA presentations. Right: Executive Director Kanig explaining to the Chilean Delegation why HIDTA is successful.



## Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP) Intersessional Meeting

Executive Director John Kanig, along with Deputy Director James Doby and DIO Rodney F. Querrard attended the 2024 Intersessional meeting of the ACCP. The meeting was held in Miami on December 3rd and 4th. The meeting consisted of two days of constructive conversations on strategies designed to reduce violent crimes in the Eastern Caribbean Region, disrupt the flow of drugs through the Caribbean, and curb firearm importation into Caribbean nations from the United States. Also in attendance were several members of the US Law Enforcement Community to include the US Marshals, ATF, FBI, and CBP. DIO Querrard issued a survey during the meeting in efforts to learn more about the threat of "PINK COCAINE" which has surfaced in the region in recent months. The results of that survey will be shared with our foreign and domestic partners for future planning.



*Above, left: CBP Port Director Todd Bellew, DIO Querrard, Deputy Director Doby, ACCP President Atlee Rodney, VIPD Police Commissioner Mario Brooks, and Executive Director Kanig. Above right: Executive Director Kanig seated with the Caribbean Delegates. Bottom Picture: Caribbean Commissioners of Police with Executive Director Kanig, Deputy Director Doby, and DIO Querrard.*





## ISC Hosts DEA Family Day

On August 28, 2024, personnel from the HIDTA Investigative Support Center (ISC) participated in the 2024 DEA Family Summit. This Summit is designed to educate and raise awareness among the school communities about the risks and consequences of fentanyl and drug trafficking. The event featured the participation of approximately 250 high schoolers in the 11th and 12th grade from the municipality of Barceloneta, Puerto Rico (PR). Community outreach programs such as the Community Program of the municipality of Barceloneta, the PR Commission for Traffic Safety, and non-profit entities also participated. In addition, the event included the participation of recruiters from the University of PR, Arecibo campus, University Ana G. Méndez, PR Army National Guard, PR Air National Guard, and DEA.

During the event, HIDTA Intelligence Analyst Aleysha Rodríguez and DEA Intelligence Research Specialist Yamarie Montalvo provided the students with a presentation regarding the Narco Culture and the influence of the violence and drug trafficking through the reggeaton music.

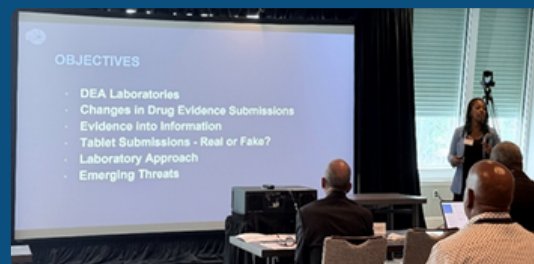


Above: DEA Intel Analyst Yamarie Montalvo and Intel GS Verónica Martínez speaking to the kids. Below left: ISC Personnel at the DEA Family Summit. Below right: Kids listening to presentations at the DEA Family Summit.



## The US Virgin Islands FUSION Center hosted their second Annual Emerging Threats Symposium in St. Thomas on November 14 – 15, 2024

During the Symposium, HIDTA Investigative Support Center Intelligence Analyst Aleysha Rodríguez, along with DIO Rodney F. Querrard, and PHA Amulen Wirsy provided a presentation on the Opioid Threat in the Caribbean. The presentation focused on the drug's epidemic in Puerto Rico and the USVI, and how opioids affected the quality of life of the residents of these territories. It also highlighted law enforcement efforts against drug trafficking organizations, and their illicit activities, such as, trafficking and diverting these illicit substances. Additionally, new emerging opioid threats were discussed, as well as prevention initiatives to address the opioid abuse/misuse. DEA Chemist Kiana F. Nurideen also briefed on the DEA process of submitting and analyzing drug exhibits, and the science of identifying substances contained in the drug exhibits.



Left: HIDTA Intelligence Analyst Rodríguez briefs of trends in trafficking at the Symposium. Center: DIO Querrard and PHA Wirsy brief of drug threats in the Caribbean. Right: DEA Chemist Nuriden talks about lab capabilities at the Symposium.

## PREVENTION

### US Virgin Islands HIDTA Prevention Initiative

The US Virgin Islands HIDTA Prevention Initiative once again exceeded its expectation for presentations in public schools in the St. Thomas/St. John district this quarter. This was due to the diligence of Ms. DeShawn Williams, Program Manager in the Office of the Insular Superintendent at the Department of Education. She ensured that the schools were scheduled and ready, and those needing to be rescheduled were done so timely. "Thank you, Ms. Williams!"

Public Health Analyst (PHA) Amulen Wirsiy and Drug Intelligence Officer (DIO) Rodney F. Querrard from October 22nd to December 13th addressed approximately 3568 students in the 3rd through 12th grades. Schools included Jane E. Tuitt Elementary School, Joseph Sibilly Elementary School, Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School, Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Julius E. Sprauve School, Edith Williams Alternative School, Lockhart K-8 School, Yvonne E. Milliner Bowsky Elementary School, Joseph A. Gomez Elementary School, Ulla F. Muller Elementary School and Charlotte Amalie High School. Each presentation was very interactive giving students the opportunity to participate in the discussion. Subjects included substance abuse/misuse, peer pressure, violence, opiates (prescribed and illicit), edibles, marijuana, alcohol and vaping, among other topics. Based on feedback from the students and teachers/monitors/counselors present, the presentations were timely, and are being requested to take place more often.

The USVI HIDTA Prevention Initiative would like to thank VIPD Task Force Officer Stephanie Gabriel with Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) for participating in some of the presentations. It is truly appreciated. PHA Wirsiy and DIO Querrard have requested from USVI Department of Education leadership a schedule for the St. Croix district so that arrangements can be made to do similar presentations in that district in early 2025.



*Top Left: Students at Joseph A. Gomez Elementary School, St. Thomas. Top center: PHA Wirsiy, HSI VIPD Task Force Officer Gabriel, and DIO Querrard. Top Right: Students at Julius Sprauve School, St. John. Bottom Left: Students at Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, St. Thomas.*

### Prevention Initiative, Puerto Rico - ALIANZA

The Alianza para un Puerto Rico sin Drogas "Prevention in Action" project developed at the Ramón Vilá Mayo and Dr. Arturo Morales schools located in San Juan and the Dr. Rafael Pujals and Ponce High schools, both in Ponce, Puerto Rico, concluded in November 2024.

Using the capacity-building model, the Alianza seeks to empower youth with life skills to prevent substance use and violence while promoting mental and behavioral health. Students have been trained in emotion management, interpersonal relationships, empathy, decision-making, conflict management, and development of critical thinking, among other topics.

The project's next phase is producing/filming the preventive messages, developed by the students, for social networks and television.



*Students at the Ramón Vilá Mayo and Dr. Arturo Morales schools in Puerto Rico.*



# Overdose Response Strategy

## Puerto Rico

### Overdose Spike in Arecibo

In October 2024, an unprecedented thread of 12 fatal suspected overdose cases occurred in the municipality of Arecibo. Overall, 33 overdose incidents were registered, 13 of which were hospitalized.

Preliminary drug tests conducted by the Forensic Sciences Institute (ICF, *in Spanish*) resulted positive for fentanyl mixed with cocaine and/or xylazine in almost all cases. The average age of 11 of the 12 deceased cases is 46.6 years, comprising nine (9) males and two (2) females. Some were residents of four (4) other municipalities, close to Arecibo. Although most of the incidents occurred between October 8th and 18th, 2024, the first fatal case related to this thread was of a 38-year-old male on October 1st.

On October 10th, teams from the Department of Health (DoH) and the Mental Health and Against Addictions Services Administration (ASSMCA, *in Spanish*), initiated an emergency response in the communities where most of the overdose incidents happened. Intranasal spray naloxone kits and fentanyl test strips (FTS) were distributed during outreach activities, along with information and referrals to substance use services available in the area.

Two (2) drug labs were occupied by the Puerto Rico Police Bureau (NPPR, *in Spanish*) and two (2) out of three (3) suspects were arrested with charges of drugs and firearms.



Map 1: Archipelago of Puerto Rico showing the municipality of Arecibo in red.

### ODMAP Training in Bayamón

On Monday, November 18th, DIO José O. Rodríguez and PHA Francisco A. Torres-Cardona facilitated the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program (ODMAP) implementation training to a group of emergency medical technicians (EMTs) from the Disaster and Pre-Hospital Medicine (DIPHOM), the municipal emergency medical system of Bayamón. The purpose of this training session was to introduce the data report system to newly recruited personnel and as a refresher for those familiarized with ODMAP.

The municipality of Bayamón has used ODMAP since 2020 and is a recipient of the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP) grant. This fund serves to foster and strengthen public safety and public health collaboration through the implementation of strategies focused on the prevention and reduction of overdoses in the municipality.



DIO Rodríguez address EMTs about ODMAP.

## HIDTA INVESTIGATIVE SUCCESS

### Caribbean Corridor Strike Force

During the past quarter, CCSF agents continued to investigate and dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs). As a result of the efforts, CCSF seized a total of 3186 kilograms of cocaine, indicted a total of 15 individuals, and seized \$50,000. Within the arrests executed by CCSF agents, one individual was extradited from the Dominican Republic to the District of Puerto Rico.



*A cocaine load seized on the beach after traffickers offloaded and fled.*

### HIDTA – AIRTAT



AIRTAT agents seized a total of 466 kilograms of cocaine and arrested 6 individuals as a result of active investigations targeting organizations utilizing the Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport to transport large amounts of cocaine to the continental United States (CONUS). In addition, AIRTAT agents have constantly provided support to the United States Postal Service for the interdiction of suspicious packages being sent to the mainland with narcotics.

### St. Croix DEA/HIDTA

In a major success for PR/VI HIDTA and the island of St. Croix, Ivan JAMES was sentenced to 35 years as the kingpin of a violent transnational criminal organization. This is the culmination of a multi-year investigation led by HIDTA investigators of the St. Croix MOI and the first-ever major trafficker charged in a RICO conspiracy in the territory. The drug trafficking network led by Ivan James had been terrorizing the citizens of the US Virgin Islands for decades and was of the utmost priority to HIDTA investigators. There were several prongs to this investigation to include murder, assault, cultivation of marijuana, and trafficking of cocaine. James was one of seven defendants in this complex trial.

If it was not for the unique capabilities and resources afforded by ONDCP and the HIDTA program, this individual most likely would have escaped justice and continued to murder people with impunity and plunder the US Virgin Islands of its resources. This case was presented to the US Attorney for the District of the Virgin Islands, and as a team we achieved something groundbreaking. We strive to continue leveraging these federal resources to put behind bars the most violent drug traffickers that are terrorizing innocent citizens of the island and its visitors.

It's not often we get to charge a homicide in federal court – the RICO statute allowed the family of the defendant to get justice it so deserved. We specifically recognize the efforts of HIDTA Task Force Officer (retired) David Wyrzykowski and Special Agent Mark Cory, who initiated this case in 2013.



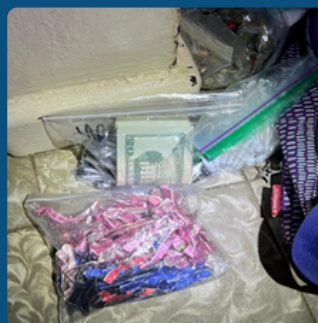
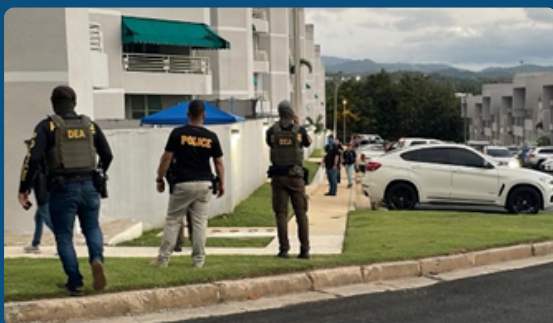
*Pictures, left to right: Agents destroying grow operation; Booking photo of target Ivan James; Weapons seized from the James DTO.*



## HIDTA Task Force Group 4 - OPERATION CASTLE SWEEP

On 03/29/2024, Puerto Rico Police Bureau (PRPB) Agent Ramos-Vélez was brutally murdered by members of Sabana Abajo Drug Trafficking Organization. This event triggered the mobilization of DEA HIDTA TF-4, FBI San Juan, and PRPB personnel to focus on the housing community to collect evidence and identify members of the Sabana Abajo DTO. During a Fentanyl ongoing investigation in Sabana Abajo Public Housing Community, DEA HIDTA TF-4 Opioids Initiative and PRPB Carolina Strike Force personnel worked together and identified 25 members of Sabana Abajo DTO in charge of distributing Fentanyl and other drugs laced with Fentanyl in Sabana Abajo drug points. DEA HIDTA TF-4 and Carolina Strike Force conducted numerous enforcement operations that resulted in the seizure of cocaine and heroin laced with Fentanyl distributed in Sabana Abajo PHP. This opened a full collaboration between DEA HIDTA TF-4, PRPB, FBI, ATF, and HSI to investigate this violent and Fentanyl drug distribution DTO.

This full collaboration resulted in the indictment of 56 members of this DTO, including PRPB corrupt police officers providing confidential information to members of Sabana Abajo DTO. This shows the collaboration of Federal, State, and local agencies to investigate the distribution of Fentanyl and the violence from DTO's in Puerto Rico. DEA TF-4 and Carolina Strike Force will continue working bilateral investigations to identify Domestic and Foreign Fentanyl Sources of Supply in this area.



Pictures, left to right: PRPB Eliezer Ramos-Vélez who was murdered on March 24, 2024 by the Sabana Abajo DTO; DEA and PRPB searching for targets; Heroin laced with Fentanyl seized along with cash; ASAC Cliff Brown, SA Javier Pérez, GS Pedro Pérez



*WISHING ALL A HAPPY, PROSPEROUS, HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE AND SAFE  
NEW YEAR!*