

United States Senate

April 5, 2018

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Gang-related violence throughout the United States—and the drug and human trafficking that often accompanies such violence—continues to threaten the safety and security of American families and communities. In my home state of Louisiana, for example, crime continues to be a problem, particularly in New Orleans. Earlier this year, a police official attributed the rise of homicides in the city's sixth district to feuding between gangs and an increase in gang activity.¹

The National Gang Intelligence Center's most recent report states that domestic gangs continue to grow in numbers and expand their criminal activities. Street gangs often engage in small- and large-scale drug trafficking, assault, threats and intimidation, and robbery, while also fostering partnerships with Mexican Transnational Criminal Organizations (MTCOs), sex trafficking rings, and extremist groups. The Drug Enforcement Administration's (DEA) 2017 National Drug Threat Assessment highlighted the role that domestic gangs play in exploiting drug addiction problems in our nation, citing numerous examples of increased violent domestic gang activity through street-level drug trafficking and affiliation with MTCOs. With an opioid epidemic gripping our nation, we must do all we can to crack down on the gangs contributing to the crisis.

A variety of federal agencies are involved in efforts to combat gang activity in the United States, including the DEA, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), Bureau of Prisons (BOP), U.S. Marshals Service, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). These agencies lead or are involved in efforts related to violent gangs, such as the National Gang Intelligence Center, the National Violence Reduction Network, DEA's 360 Strategy, ICE's Operation Community Shield, and FBI's Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Forces.

A 2009 GAO report found that the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security could better coordinate their efforts to combat criminal activity from domestic gangs and measure the effectiveness of such efforts.² The GAO recommended some improvements that have not been implemented and may need to be reexamined. Since then, the drug epidemic has worsened

¹ The Times-Picayune, *Increase in 6th District violence is attributed to gangs: NOPD*, February 28, 2018
http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2018/02/uptick_in_gang_violence_in_6th.html

² GAO-09-708, *Combating Gangs: Better Coordination and Performance Measurement Would Help Clarify Roles of Federal Agencies and Strengthen Assessment of Efforts*, July 2009.

in our country, and Congress has authorized significant investments in Central American narcotics control, law enforcement, and anti-gang efforts.

Given the number of agencies involved, the calls over time for better interagency coordination, and the relative lack of data regarding agency efforts, we ask that GAO conduct a study addressing the following questions:

1. What do federal agencies and other stakeholders report as the key factors contributing to domestic gang proliferation in the United States, and what is known about the nature, scope, and impact of gang-related criminal activity?
2. What current federal strategies, including grant making, are underway to combat criminal activity associated with domestic gangs, and to what extent are agencies measuring outcomes and identifying any promising practices resulting from these approaches?
3. What types of collaborative practices to combat gangs are federal agencies engaged in, and to what extent do these approaches adhere to established principles for effective intra-and inter-agency collaboration?

Thank you for your help in addressing these issues. My office and I would welcome the opportunity to receive updates as you conduct your work. Please contact Maria Sierra at maria_sierra@cassidy.senate.gov with any questions you may have regarding this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bill Cassidy, M.D." in a cursive style.

Bill Cassidy, M.D.
U.S. Senator