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**Media Advisory**

**THE BUSINESS OF CRIME PART I**  
**By: Elizabeth Ortiz, Executive Director of APAAC**

\$1.5 billion/\$51 million. Big dollars. And these are just the solid numbers we can corroborate. How big? Arizona's entire state budget is just over \$11 billion dollars.

2014 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Task Force (HIDTA) operations in Arizona seized drugs with a wholesale value of \$1.5 billion and diverted \$51 million in cash (it is yet to be determined how much of this is real and how much is counterfeit—a job the Secret Service division of the US Treasury Department is attacking next) and assets from the criminals.

These huge numbers are mind boggling to most of us. But to the drug cartels, they merely represent the cost of doing business. When actual dollars are seized there is slightly more alarm on their part than when the drugs are intercepted. The marijuana (1.1 million lbs.), cocaine (1100 lbs.), meth (one ton), heroin (694 lbs.) they make more. The cash, not so much.

HIDTA is team effort—17 federal, state and local agencies work together to manage, investigate, interdict and prosecute these cases statewide, as Arizona is a conduit for the drug trade from Mexico throughout the US. Theirs is not an easy task, even though the numbers make it sound like it.

Although many believe this is an example of how we have lost the war on drugs and therefore should fold up our tent and walk away, Arizona's law enforcement knows that these efforts are bearing fruit by protecting our kids from even more drugs and cartel crime that would flourish without it. If you don't believe us, just look at the backing El Chapo has—he is so effective that he can't even be kept in jail in a country where his activity is *de facto* legal. He won't conveniently crawl back into his tunnel if and when the US makes drugs legal.

*"Empowering Arizona's prosecutors to administer justice and contribute to public safety through training and advocacy."*

Crime it can be a collection of small, seemingly unrelated transactions that turn out, behind the scenes to be part of a global operation. And people at all levels of society are easily lured into assisting with these lucrative operations, becoming accomplices before they know it.

In each and every case where cash or property is seized, a civil lawsuit is filed. As with any lawsuit relating to property is brought in the civil rather than criminal court, with all the same due process offered to any person litigating a business or personal injury claim, and then some. A judge supervises, there is notice and service of process along with the opportunity and ample time to plead one's case. A judge ultimately makes the call; if the state proves the civil standard of a preponderance of the evidence that the items were used for a criminal purpose, they are forfeited to the agencies conducting the interdiction, which are very often a collection of several, such as with the HIDTA task forces.

The Arizona Court of Appeals summed up the philosophy at work in the forfeiture process:

The purpose ... removing the economic incentive to engage in racketeering, reducing the financial ability of racketeers to continue to engage in crime, preventing unfair business competition by persons with access to crime proceeds, compensating victims of racketeering, and reimbursing the State for the costs of prosecution." *State v. Gravano*.

Every dollar we take from a criminal organization and turn back into resources to fight crime is a dollar that is not subtracted from education or health care. Who better to pay for fighting crime than criminals? They seem to be the ones who can afford it. -30-