

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0309

March 3, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Biden:

We write to express support for funding of a common integration platform (CIP) program for the integration and data aggregation of nonintrusive inspection (NII) technology for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) at our nation's land and seaports of entry (POEs). Establishing a CIP for CBP is a critical piece to meeting our shared goal of stopping illicit drugs, like fentanyl, at our nation's borders.

Overdose deaths in the United States, particularly due to fentanyl poisoning, continue to pose a grave threat to our communities. Approximately three quarters of overdose deaths last year involved synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, a figure that has been dramatically rising. Overdose deaths involving synthetic opioids have nearly doubled over the past two years, accounting for over 75,000 deaths in the 12-month period ending in September 2022.¹

CBP seizures of fentanyl at our borders have tripled between FY 2019 and FY 2022 from nearly 5,000 pounds to nearly 15,000 pounds in FY 2022. In FY 2023, CBP has already seized over 12,000 pounds of fentanyl, stopping those drugs from getting into our communities.² We support the goal of increasing CBP's inspection capacity at ports of entry from 2 percent of passenger vehicles and 17 percent of cargo vehicles to 40 percent of passenger vehicles and 70 percent of cargo vehicles to stop more fentanyl from getting into the U.S.³ Further, we support continuing efforts to increase inspection capacity to reach 100 percent. Increasing the inspection rates will provide a meaningful impact on the illicit importation of drugs, and importantly, of fentanyl, at our borders.

Agency intelligence indicates the majority of drugs entering the United States come through POEs with significant concentration along the Southwest Border. NII technologies are a critical tool to enhance the ability of CBP to quickly detect illicit drugs and weapons. NII technology is a

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

² <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/drug-seizure-statistics>

³ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/02/07/fact-sheet-in-state-of-the-union-president-biden-to-outline-vision-to-advance-progress-on-unity-agenda-in-year-ahead/>

powerful tool for CBP to detect the presence of illicit substances, including fentanyl, hidden within cargo containers, commercial trucks, rail cars, and passenger vehicles. Since Congress has provided funding for NII, CBP is focused on increasing inspection rates by investing in newer drive-through NII systems in pre-primary inspection areas, giving CBP officers the ability to review images of the NII scans earlier in the screening process.

CBP's pilot at the Brownsville port of entry has demonstrated that with 100 percent scanning, the agency can reduce wait times as well. Brownsville was able to reduce wait times from 2 hours to 45 minutes and increase throughput of cargo vehicles by 25 percent with its command center that utilizes a CIP. This reduction in wait times with an increase in inspection capacity has an important economic benefit of increasing the number of commercial and passenger vehicles that can travel through the port. A report published last month by the Atlantic Council, stated that, "[a] 10-minute reduction in wait times [at the land border] would...lead to an average of 388 new loaded containers entering the United States from Mexico monthly. This translates to \$25.9 million worth of cargo crossing through the United States' four border states (Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas)...Separately, the 10-minute reduction in wait times would lead to 5,020 additional noncommercial monthly crossings, resulting in \$547,000 in extra monthly spending by families and individuals traveling from Mexico to the four US-border states every month."⁴

Investment in CIP technology represents a balanced approach that leverages technology to provide a force multiplier capability for CBP officers while increasing trade and travel. This would have the dual benefit of helping the agency combat the epidemic of synthetic opioid overdoses that has gripped our communities and increase the economic benefit that ports provide to border states and the nation. We urge you to dedicate CBP funding for a CIP program of record to be deployed nationwide at CBP's ports of entry. We also look forward to working with you to ensure there is dedicated funding in the FY 2024 budget to advance this effort.

Sincerely,



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator

⁴ The Atlantic Council, *The Transformative Power of Reduced Wait Times At the US-Mexico Border*, 17 Feb. 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/the-transformative-power-of-reduced-wait-times-at-the-us-mexico-border-economic-benefits-for-border-states/>



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget