



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

August 9, 2023

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

Thank you for your May 31, 2023 letter to the Department of Homeland Security regarding U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations' (HSI) deconfliction efforts on the Chapitos faction of the Sinaloa Cartel. I am responding on behalf of the Department.

HSI's investigation targeting the Chapitos, known as Operation Paisano, has been an extraordinary success, not only in leading to the arrest of the notorious Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín Guzmán-Loera (also known as El Chapo) but also significantly degrading overall cartel leadership. The evidence generated from Operation Paisano led to federal indictments and convictions of multiple high-level drug offenders and was featured prominently in the trial of El Chapo in 2018 and 2019 in Brooklyn, New York. HSI indicted, arrested, extradited, and provided a significant number of valuable cooperators who testified at that trial. HSI special agents were a valuable part of the trial team.

Operation Paisano led to the 2018 indictments of Ovidio Guzmán-López (also known as El Ratón) and Joaquín Guzmán-López (also known as El Guero) through the Department of Justice (DOJ) Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Section (NDDs). Both subjects are El Chapo's sons, heirs, and successors who are intimately involved in the smuggling of substantial amounts of dangerous narcotics into the United States. HSI successfully nominated them as Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force Consolidated Priority Organizational Targets in 2019, signifying their importance. These two individuals, along with their half-brothers Iván Archivaldo Guzmán-Salazar and Jesús Alfredo Guzmán-Salazar, inherited their father's drug trafficking organization, and together they are collectively known as the Chapitos.

HSI regularly coordinated with other law enforcement partners, including the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), to ensure formidable indictments that would withstand Mexico's rigorous extradition process. The four brothers were the successors to El Chapo's faction of the Sinaloa Cartel, and their influence as El Chapo's heirs allowed them to become some of the most powerful drug traffickers in Mexico. After their father's arrest, the Chapitos continued to gain strength, and were among the main producers and traffickers of fentanyl and methamphetamine to the United States.

Operation Paisano led to the October 2019 arrest of Ovidio Guzmán-López in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico, by Mexican authorities working in conjunction with HSI's offices in Mexico. Following his arrest, Ovidio's brothers mounted coordinated attacks with cartel gunmen on the Mexican Army to force the Mexican government to release him, a high-profile event known as the "Battle of Culiacán" or the "Culiacanazo," resulting in at least 12 deaths from the violence. Mexican President Andrés Manuel López-Obrador ordered Ovidio's release later that day. This emboldened the Chapitos and established them as preeminent drug traffickers and cartel leaders wielding significant influence over criminal activity in the United States and Mexico. It also increased the Chapitos' popularity with younger drug traffickers and organized criminals throughout Sinaloa, further destabilizing the region.

After the failed capture operation, HSI's Special Operations Unit, which is co-located with DEA's Special Operations Division, continued to track and investigate leads connected to the Chapitos. HSI worked with DOJ and the FBI to pursue a consolidated joint efforts to bring additional charges against all four Chapitos in a single indictment that covered all charges and sought maximum penalties.

The NDDS specializes in prosecuting international narcotics trafficking investigations and has been integral to Operation Paisano and in the arrest of the Chapito's father, Joaquin Guzman Loera "El Chapo," and his later trial in the Eastern District of New York. NDDS obtained the first indictments on Ovidio and Joaquin Guzman-Lopez with HSI. NDDS is also one of the prosecuting authorities on the recent indictments of all four Chapitos in the Northern District of Illinois.

On December 14, 2022, federal prosecutors obtained a joint, superseding indictment against all four Chapitos that included charges of 36 violations under the Continuing Criminal Enterprise statute, which carries a potential sentence of life imprisonment. The evidence obtained from Operation Paisano accounts for 11 of the 36 violations.

On January 5, 2023, HSI successfully coordinated with Mexican counterparts to effect the arrest of Ovidio Guzmán-López in Jesús María, Sinaloa, Mexico. HSI coordinated with DOJ prosecutors to submit an extradition request to the Mexican government in accordance with established rules.

HSI continues to target members of the Sinaloa Cartel, including those affiliated with the Chapitos organization, and will remain steadfast in its mission to combat transnational criminal organizations responsible for the flow of deadly drugs into the United States. HSI is committed to pursuing joint investigations with its federal, state, local, tribal, and international partners, which will ensure optimal success in our shared missions and common goals.

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Thank you again for your letter. Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact the ICE Office of Congressional Relations at (202) 732-4200.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Patrick J. Lechleitner', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick J. Lechleitner
Deputy Director and
Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Director