

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 30, 2026

The Honorable Todd Blanche
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear Attorney General Blanche:

We write requesting that the Department of Justice (DOJ) investigate the growing role of Chinese transnational criminal organizations in America's cannabis and intoxicating-hemp markets. Recent reporting and investigations suggest Chinese criminal networks are exploiting vulnerabilities in federal law to operate expansive illicit drug enterprises that threaten our communities and national security.

The Drug Enforcement Administration's 2025 National Drug Threat Assessment found that Chinese transnational criminal organizations dominate marijuana cultivation and distribution in the United States, especially in states with legal cannabis markets.¹ These organizations purchase and lease American land for illegal grow operations, traffic foreign workers, and use toxic pesticides and fertilizers shipped from China, including chemicals banned in the United States. The scale and complexity of these networks make them difficult to track and raise concerns about what other illicit or synthetic products they may be introducing into the U.S. market.

Last year, seven Chinese nationals were charged with running grow houses, smuggling workers from China, and laundering millions of dollars in proceeds.² In April 2026, 29 Chinese nationals were charged in a nationwide black-market marijuana operation centered in Oklahoma.³ Most recently, local authorities in Siskiyou County, California detailed a sprawling system of industrial-scale illegal grows, many of which are run by Chinese nationals. The growers have been linked to human trafficking, violent crime, and toxic foreign pesticides.⁴ But their scale and a "shell game" of property records have complicated efforts to dismantle them.

Congress has recognized the need to address vulnerabilities in this market, including closing gaps in the 2018 Farm Bill that allowed unregulated intoxicating hemp and THC products to proliferate. These reforms are set to take effect on December 11, 2026. Leaving the loophole unaddressed would give these networks additional time to flood American commerce with synthetic products. This would also further entrench their operations on American soil, fund their enterprises with illicit revenue, and expose consumers to unregulated, dangerous synthetic products masquerading as legal hemp.

¹ <https://www.dea.gov/sites/default/files/2025-07/2025NationalDrugThreatAssessment.pdf>

² <https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/pr/seven-chinese-nationals-charged-alleged-roles-multi-million-dollar-money-laundering>

³ <https://www.justice.gov/usao-wdok/pr/homeland-security-task-force-investigation-results-51-defendant-indictment-nationwide>

⁴ <https://www.city-journal.org/article/california-china-marijuana-siskiyou>

While this will address harmful products currently in the market, questions remain about who is financing and supporting these organizations operating within the industry. We therefore request that the DOJ fully investigate these criminal networks, including their financing, land usage, chemical imports, and any connections to the Chinese Communist Party.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



Ted Budd
United States Senator



Pete Ricketts
United States Senator



Susan Collins
United States Senator