



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 23, 2019

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**REPORT: Boosts to Early Learning in Illinois
will curb crime, say law enforcement leaders**
At Rockford preschool, officials point to long-term costs-savings for state

Rockford, Illinois — A statewide organization of police chiefs, sheriffs, and state’s attorneys released a report today, urging increased support for early childhood education in Illinois. The law enforcement leaders pointed to research showing that quality preschool improves later school performance, reduces the number of high-school drop-outs, and cuts the likelihood that participants will end up committing violent crimes.

Speaking at the Summerdale Early Learning Center, in Rockford, Illinois, Rockford Chief of Police Daniel O’Shea said, “Addressing violent crime in Rockford is my number one priority. Beyond enhanced policing of our streets, we’ve also got to make sure we create a solid foundation for a safer tomorrow. That’s what preschool for these children can do.”

Illinois currently spends over \$2 billion a year to incarcerate adults in state prisons and local jails. The report, “**Illinois’ Path to Prosperity: Boost Early Learning to Cut Costs and Curb Crime,**” [available at bit.ly/IL_Prosperty] states that, by expanding preschool access, Illinois could reduce the costs of incarceration and realize billions of dollars in societal benefits over the lifetimes of the children served.

The report cites a longitudinal study of the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, which found that children *not* served by the program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18. The savings from cutting crime — along with the increased earning potential for participants and reductions in health care and other societal costs — creates a remarkable return-on-investment for quality early childhood education. If Illinois can reach a goal of serving 8 out of 10 of our disadvantaged children with full-day preschool, the state could accrue nearly \$3 billion in societal benefits over their lifetimes.

In supporting a step forward to meeting that goal, 163 members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois sent a letter to Governor Pritzker and legislative leaders in February, urging a commitment to include at least \$250 million for early childhood infrastructure needs in any new capital bill. Members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids also support the Governor’s proposal to increase the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) by \$100 million for FY 2020.

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The unmet need in Winnebago County is clear. Earlier this month, the Erikson Institute released its “Risk and Reach” report, which identified Winnebago County as one of twelve “high-risk” counties in the state, due to the numbers of children living in or near poverty. The report found that while Winnebago County and the City of Rockford have done a good job reaching disadvantaged children with early childhood programs, there remains a tremendous unmet need: More than half the at-risk children in the county are not currently being served by preschool, and only 22% of the incoming kindergarteners were assessed as demonstrating full readiness for school.

For FY2019, Winnebago County public school districts received only 63% of their requested \$16 million for Preschool for All programs funded through the ECBG, leaving at least a \$6 million shortfall.

By helping to reduce this shortfall, said the Winnebago law enforcement leaders, the state can both meet families’ needs, and advance long-term public safety and prosperity.

“I am pleased to be an invested partner in the collaboration of early preschool education that enhances my vision of striving to keep children in the classroom and not the courtroom,” said Winnebago County State’s Attorney Marilyn Hite Ross, before joining Chief O’Shea and area legislators in reading to preschool students.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois is a bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization of over 330 police chiefs, sheriffs, state’s attorneys, leaders of law enforcement organizations, and victims of violence.

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