



# High-quality Pre-Kindergarten Can Prevent Teenage Pregnancy And Future Crime in Maine

A Report from FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *MAINE*



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *MAINE* is part of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, a national, bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization. The organization has a membership of more than 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and victims of violence. The members take a hard-nosed look at what works—and what doesn't work—to prevent crime and violence. They then recommend effective strategies to state and national policymakers.

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## FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS MAINE

Dear Reader:

The police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and crime survivors who make up FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS MAINE are determined to see dangerous criminals behind bars. We know, however, that no amount of punishment can undo the agony of crime. When children don't get the right start in life, we're all at risk.

Long-term studies show that at-risk children who attend high-quality pre-kindergarten programs are far less likely to become criminals than those denied access to such programs. This report examines a second impact of pre-kindergarten programs. It finds that by reducing the number of children who will grow up to become teen parents, pre-kindergarten programs actually cut crime in the next generation, among the children of the children.

With over 1,200 babies born to teen mothers in Maine each year, law enforcement leaders believe it's time to increase investment in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs that can reduce teen pregnancies, and cut crime in this generation and the next.

Today, state and federal pre-kindergarten programs serve only 27 percent of Maine's 3- and 4-year-olds due to lack of funding. With tuition at private preschool programs exceeding the cost of tuition at a public university, the shortage of government-supported programs forces many low- and moderate-income working families to resort to care that often amounts to little more than "child storage."

Years of research show that compared to older women, teen moms are more likely to drop out of school, raise their children alone, live in poverty and spend time on welfare. As this report shows, investment in high-quality pre-kindergarten will give all kids a fair shot at success in school and in life, and will save taxpayers money in future crime, welfare and other costs.

That is why Maine Chiefs of Police Association and the Maine Sheriffs' Association along with national organizations such as The Fraternal Order of Police and the National District Attorneys Association are united in calling on policy-makers to increase federal investments so all families have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.

Best regards,

Butch Asselin  
Skowhegan Chief of Police

Mark A. Westrum  
Sagadahoc County Sheriff

## Executive Summary

### Teen Pregnancy Leads to More Crime

- Children born to mothers who begin childbearing in their teenage years are more likely to commit crime than children born to older mothers. A 1997 study found that the sons of teen mothers are 2.7 times more likely to spend time in prison than the sons of older mothers.
- If all teen mothers in Maine were to postpone their first births until the age of 23, their sons' incarceration risk would fall by 17 percent.
- More than 1,200 babies are born to teen mothers in Maine every year.

### High-quality Pre-kindergarten Programs Reduce Teen Pregnancy, Save Money

- The North Carolina Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention program randomly assigned infants from low-income families to receive early education intervention for five to eight years. Those who received the early education were on average 19 when their first child was born compared with 17 for those who did not attend.
- High-quality pre-kindergarten programs could cut Maine's teen births by nearly three-quarters from 1,219 to 325 if teens delayed childbearing by two years.
- Children from low-income families were randomly assigned at ages 3 and 4 to participate in the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan. By age 27, only 8 percent of the women who attended had more than three out-of-wedlock births, compared to 31 percent of the women who did not attend.
- The Perry Preschool Program saved taxpayers, victims, and participants more than \$7 for every \$1 invested.

### High-quality Pre-kindergarten Unavailable for Many At-Risk Maine Children

- State and federal pre-kindergarten programs in Maine serve only 27 percent of the state's 3- and 4-year-olds, forcing many working families to put their children in care that is more like "child storage" than education.
- Without government assistance, the cost of pre-kindergarten is beyond the means of many working families. Tuition for a 4-year-old in Maine averages \$4,899 annually, more than the annual tuition at a public university.
- To achieve reductions in teen pregnancy and crime, pre-kindergarten programs must be of high quality. Unfortunately, the quality of pre-kindergarten education in Maine was rated between "minimal" and "good" in the 2004 study.

Federal and state governments should increase funding so all families have access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs. Anything less threatens more teen pregnancy and more crime and violence. That is why the Maine Chiefs of Police Association and the Maine Sheriffs' Association have called on elected leaders to provide all children affordable access to high-quality pre-kindergarten.

# High-quality Pre-Kindergarten Can Prevent Teenage Pregnancy and Future Crime in Maine

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a national anti-crime organization of more than 2,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, county attorneys, and victims of violence, including more than 60 members in Maine.

The members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS work every day to see that dangerous criminals are put behind bars. But they know Maine needs to fight crime not just from the back end, after people have been hurt, but also from the front end, with effective strategies that keep kids from becoming criminals in the first place.

Research shows that providing quality pre-kindergarten to at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds can dramatically reduce the risk that these children will grow up to be involved in crime and violence. For example, a rigorous study of the High/Scope Perry Preschool program in Ypsilanti, Michigan found that, compared to disadvantaged children randomly assigned to participate in the program at ages 3 and 4, those left out of the program were five times

more likely to grow up to be chronic lawbreakers with five or more arrests.<sup>1</sup>

This report examines a second impact of pre-kindergarten programs. It finds that by reducing the chances that kids will grow up to have children before they are ready to be effective parents, pre-kindergarten programs can actually reach ahead to cut crime in the next generation – among the *children of the children*.

## Teen Pregnancy Leads to More Crime in the Next Generation

Many teen moms overcome obstacles and do an excellent job raising their children. Yet research makes clear that being born to teenagers is a strong “risk factor,” raising the odds that their children will engage in criminal behavior.<sup>2</sup> Compared to older mothers, teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty, have poor parenting skills, low educational attainment, difficulty providing adequate supervision, and other factors that are known to increase the risk that their children will grow

### Incarceration Rates of Sons During Their Young Adult Years

Sons of teen mothers

10.3%

Sons of older mothers  
(ages 20 to 21)

3.8%

Maynard, R.A. (Ed.), 1997

up to be involved in crime.<sup>3</sup>

Studies in both the United States and abroad come to the same conclusion: children born to mothers who begin childbearing in their teenage years are more likely to commit crime than children born to older mothers.<sup>4</sup> A 1997 study by University of California researcher Jeffrey Grogger found that the sons of teen mothers are 2.7 times more likely to spend time in prison than the sons of older mothers.<sup>5</sup> If all teen mothers were to postpone their first births until the age of 23, then their sons' incarceration risk would fall by 17 percent. This would decrease the prison population between 52,000 to 65,000 inmates nationally.<sup>6</sup>

Children of teen mothers commit not only disproportionately more crimes, but also disproportionately more violent crimes. The Rochester Youth Development Study, an ongoing study following over 600 adolescents through adulthood, found that children of teen mothers were more prone to violence than were children born to older mothers. The children of older mothers (between 19 and 20-years-old) committed primarily minor offenses, while the kids of the school-age mothers (younger than 19-years-old) committed more serious forms of delinquency, such as robbery and assault.<sup>7</sup> Even taking a range of outside factors into account, such as financial disadvantage, family structure, and style of parenting, researchers found that teen birth is an important predictor of future crime. The incidence of committing criminal offenses was two to three times greater for children born to school-age mothers than the children born to older mothers.

## Teen Pregnancy Rates in Maine and the United States

The teenage pregnancy rate in the United States is much higher than in any other industrialized country. In 2002, about 900,000 teens ages 15 to 19 became pregnant. About 40 percent of these teens were 17 or younger.<sup>8</sup> In Maine, one in every 52 teens becomes pregnant each year.<sup>9</sup> The pregnancy rates for

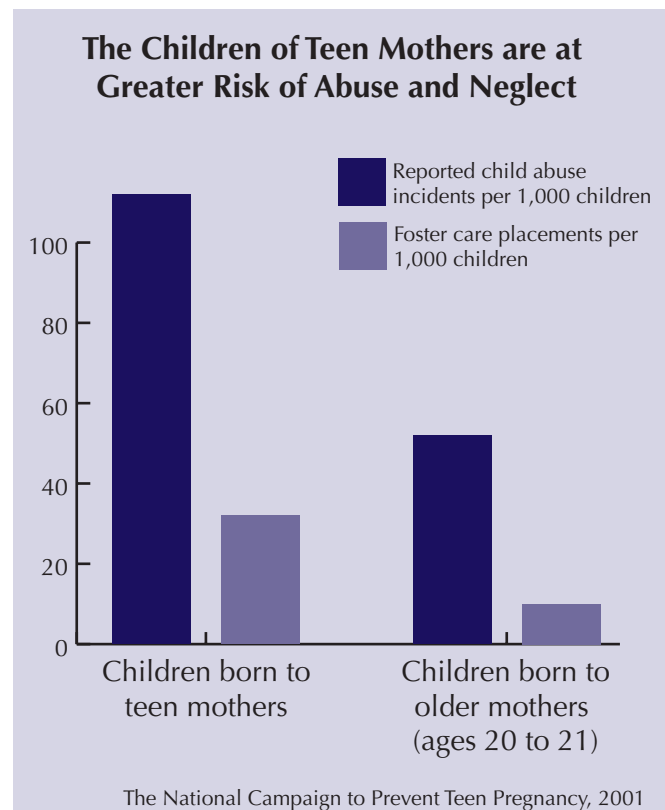
teens ages 15 to 19 varies by county in Maine, from a low of 35 per 1,000 in Franklin and Aroostook, to a high of 60 in Waldo and 64 in Oxford.<sup>10</sup> At a time when Maine's overall pregnancy rate is relatively low, some areas in Maine still have high rates. At Mt. View High School in Thorndike, Maine, for example, one in five girls became pregnant in the 2000-2001 school year.<sup>11</sup> Statewide, more than 1,219 children were born to teen moms.<sup>12</sup>

## Teen Pregnancy Hurts the Well-Being of Children

When teens become mothers, their future prospects are often unpromising. Years of research show that compared to older women, teen moms are more likely to drop out of school, raise their children alone, live in poverty, and spend some time on welfare. But their children face even more challenges, which result in an increased risk of criminal involvement. Consider the following:

- *Physical health*

Compared to children of older mothers, children born to teen mothers are more likely



to have physical health problems. They are 50 percent more likely to be low-birth-weight babies, which is associated with a host of physical complications, such as mental retardation, cerebral palsy, blindness, and chronic respiratory problems.<sup>13</sup>

- *Abuse and neglect*

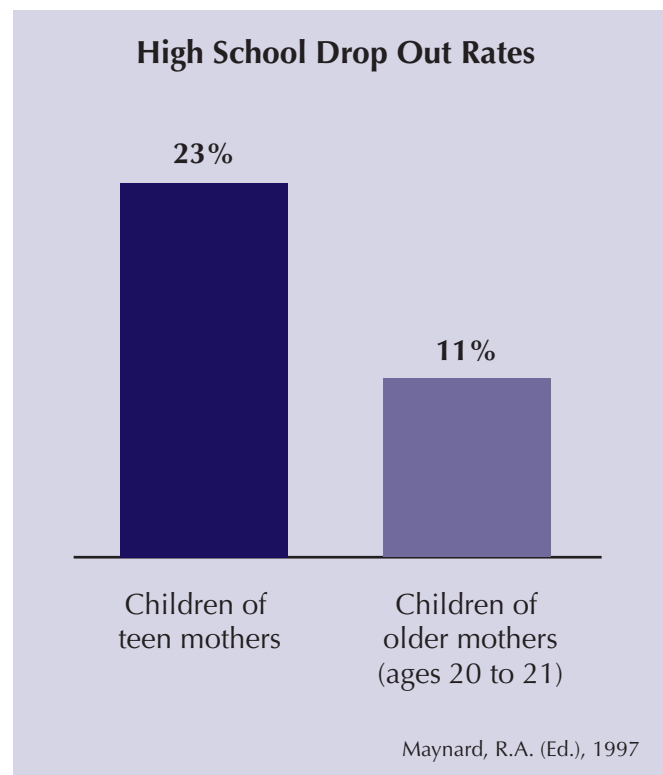
In some cases, teen moms are simply not ready to care for their children. Research fellows at the University of Chicago found that, compared to children of older mothers, children of teen mothers are twice as likely to be victims of physical abuse, abandonment, or neglect.<sup>14</sup>

- *Poverty and economic dependence*

Decades of research link teen childbearing to an increased risk of economic dependency and poverty. Most children of teen mothers must rely entirely on their mother's economic resources because they cannot count on financial support from their fathers. Only about 20 percent of fathers of children born to teen mothers marry the mothers.<sup>15</sup> Many pregnant teens drop out of high school, and most teen moms find work in minimum wage jobs with little advancement opportunity. According to a 1996 study, teen mothers can expect to earn less than half the poverty level – about \$5,600 annually for the first 13 years of parenthood.<sup>16</sup> One study reports that more than half of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager.<sup>17</sup>

- *School failure*

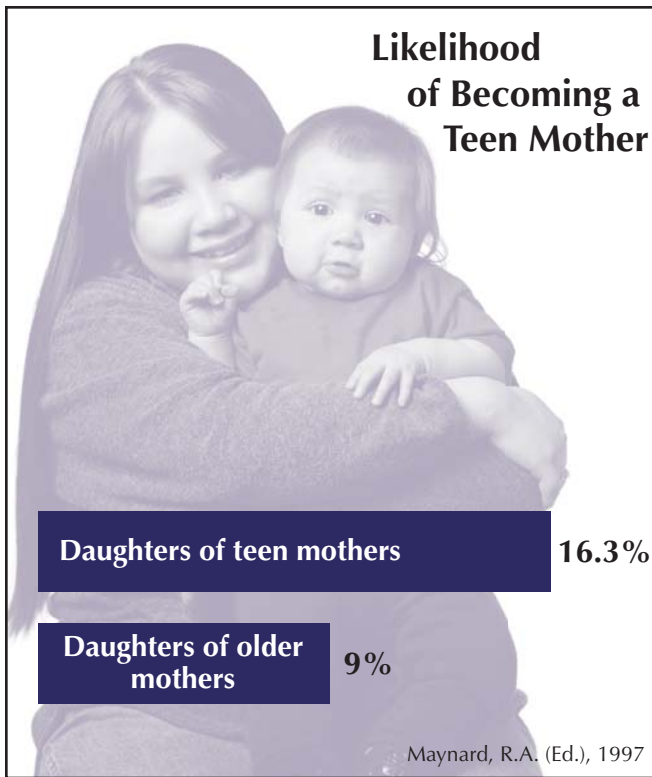
Compared to children born to older moms, children of teen mothers do worse in school. According to data from two major national surveys, children of teen moms have lower test scores in reading and math, are in lower ability groups, and have more behavior problems than other teens. They are also 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade, score lower on standardized tests, and are over 50 percent more likely to drop out of school (23 percent of children of younger mothers versus 11 percent of children of older mothers).<sup>18</sup>



- *Cycle of early and single parenthood*

With diminished prospects in education and economic status, many children of teen parents fall into the same life trajectories as their parents. According to a landmark study on second-generation teenage mothers that tracked 400 teenage mothers in Baltimore for 20 years, one-third of the daughters followed in their mothers' footsteps by giving birth in their adolescent years.<sup>19</sup> Another major study found, compared to children of older moms, daughters of teen mothers were 83 percent more likely to become mothers before the age of 18.<sup>20</sup> Like their mothers, children of teen mothers are also more likely to be single parents, and remain single parents (in Maine, 87 percent of teen pregnancies are to unwed mothers).<sup>21</sup> And they are 50 percent more likely to have children out-of-wedlock, perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of single parenthood, as most teen mothers themselves come from fatherless families.<sup>22</sup>

As the research indicates, delaying childbearing even just two years has profound societal consequences. Reducing teen pregnancy increases the well-being and success



of teens and secures a more productive and successful future for the next generation.

### Research Shows High-quality Pre-kindergarten Programs Reduce Teen Pregnancy

Two studies that followed children from pre-kindergarten through adulthood found strong evidence that early childhood education programs lead to lower teen pregnancy rates. The Abecedarian Early Childhood Intervention program demonstrated that high-quality early education programs delay pregnancy. University of North Carolina researchers randomly assigned half the infants from families with low incomes, low maternal education, and other indicators of disadvantage to receive a high-quality early education program year round with small classes and low teacher-to-student ratios. The children entered just after birth and remained in the program for five to eight years. The young adults who received the early education were, on average, two years older (19-years-old) when their first child was born compared with those who did not receive the early intervention (17-years-old).<sup>23</sup>

In 2000, 1,219 teens gave birth in Maine.<sup>24</sup> If Maine were able to delay the first births of those teens by two years, as the Abecedarian program was able to do with its high-risk population, the result would have been 73 percent fewer teen births in the state. The total number of teen births, ages 15 to 19, would drop from 1,219 to 325.<sup>25</sup>

Some of the teen mothers in Maine may not have been raised in such high-risk conditions as the children in the Abecedarian study. Nevertheless, many Maine teens that have children come from similar disadvantaged backgrounds.<sup>26</sup> Though Maine might not attain a full 73 percent decline in teen births statewide, the Abecedarian program demonstrates that high-quality early education programs can significantly reduce teen births.

In another long-term study, children from low-income families were randomly assigned at ages 3 and 4 to participate in the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Researchers collected data on teen pregnancies and births. By age 19, fewer women who participated in the Perry preschool program had multiple pregnancies (16 percent versus 29 percent). Eight years later, the study revealed that women who attended Perry had fewer out-of-wedlock births (57 percent versus 83 percent). The most dramatic difference was between the women who had multiple out-of-wedlock births. By age 27, only eight percent of the women who attended the Perry preschool program had between three to five out-of-wedlock births, compared to 31 percent of the women who did not attend Perry.<sup>27</sup>

### High-quality Pre-kindergarten Helps Children Succeed

One reason quality pre-kindergarten programs reduce teen pregnancy is because early education sets children up for success in school. Research shows that a strong attachment to school is linked to avoiding teen pregnancy. Teens who dislike school and have little academic motivation may lack a strong

desire to avoid early childbearing. They may feel as though they don't have much to lose. Motherhood may be seen as inevitable or as a better alternative to continuing high school or finding a job.

Many kids detach themselves from high school because they are not doing well – a major risk factor for teen pregnancy.<sup>28</sup> For example, girls that are held back in school before they reach the 8th grade are twice as likely to become pregnant as girls who were not held back by the 12th grade. If young girls slip into the bottom 20 percent of basic reading and math skills, they become five times more likely to become mothers over a two year high school period than the teens in the top 20 percent.<sup>29</sup> Yet another study reveals that teens with low academic ability are twice as likely to become parents by their senior year compared with students with high academic ability.<sup>30</sup> This is convincing evidence that school involvement and school success are tied to premature pregnancy and future crime.

Study after study shows that high quality pre-kindergarten programs increase academic success, keep kids in school, and help them graduate on time – factors that reduce the chances of teen pregnancy and prevent criminal behavior. High-quality pre-kindergarten programs provide young children essential academic and social skills that are critical for later success. As Isabel Sawhill from the Brookings Institution pointed out:

Preschool programs appear to [be] especially effective in raising the level of education... Early childhood education has an immediate, positive effect on a

child's intellectual performance... [and a] lasting effect on school performance. The most plausible interpretation of these results is that the programs give children the confidence that they can succeed. Success in the early years then has a cumulative impact, establishing the basis for further learning at each stage in the educational process.<sup>31</sup>

The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program study found that children from low-income families who were randomly assigned at ages 3- and 4- to participate in the program were more likely to graduate from high school (66 percent versus 45 percent). Children who were not enrolled were also twice as likely to be placed in special education classes and were a third less likely to graduate from high school on time.<sup>32</sup>

Among the girls, the difference in academic outcomes between the pre-kindergarten group and non-pre-kindergarten groups is even more dramatic. Compared to those who did not participate in the pre-kindergarten program, participating girls graduated from high school at a much higher rate. As highlighted below, approximately two and a half as many girls (five out of six) in the Perry program graduated from high school or received their GED, compared with the girls (two out of six) who did not attend the Perry program.<sup>33</sup>

Even among the girls who became pregnant as teenagers, 73 percent of the Perry program group, compared to 15 percent of the non-program group, received a high school diploma. Although teen pregnancy is a major barrier to graduation for most teens, almost

### High School Graduation Rates

	Perry Program Group	Non-program Group
High school graduation or equivalent	<b>84%</b>	<b>35%</b>
Teen mothers who graduated high school	<b>73%</b>	<b>15%</b>

High/Scope Perry Preschool

three-quarters of the Perry group had the resiliency and commitment to school to graduate and beat the odds, and thereby significantly improved their own prospects and those of their children.<sup>34</sup>

Evidence of the need for more funding for high quality pre-kindergarten in Maine can be found in a recent study on the cost and quality of early education programs. The 2004 Maine Cost and Quality Study examined full-day, year-round early care and education in Maine using a random sample of 90 community-based centers from 16 counties. Early childhood education for pre-kindergarteners in Maine, on average, received a rating that fell between “minimal” and “good” quality care on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) (ratings range from inadequate to excellent). But scores varied according to education practices. For example, more than three-fourths of the centers in the sample met the “good” benchmark on program structure, a scale to measure the balance of organization and flexibility in daily schedules. More than half of the centers met the “good” benchmark on interactions among children and between teachers and children. Yet eight out of ten of the classrooms were rated as “less than good” on the activities scale, which measures the array of activities that foster creativity. Additionally, about six out of ten of classrooms were rated as “less than good” on the language-reasoning scale, which measures, for example, the number of books and activities designed to initiate communication.<sup>35</sup>

The study also showed that centers that served mostly low- or low to moderate-income families were rated as poorer quality than centers that served predominantly moderate to high-income families. Teacher wages,

occupancy costs, and serving infants and toddlers significantly raised the costs and quality of providing care to pre-kindergarteners. As the researchers state, these findings present convincing evidence that providing higher-quality early care and education is associated with greater costs. Maine needs more federal funding for high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.<sup>36</sup>

## High-quality Pre-kindergarten Unavailable for Many At-Risk Maine Children

Over half (56 percent) of Maine’s 3- and 4-year-olds are not enrolled in an early education program because of insufficient funding.<sup>37</sup> There are an estimated 8,800 eligible children in Maine who are not being served.<sup>38</sup>

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Law enforcement leaders and researchers agree that more of our nation’s children, especially those most at-risk, must be given access to quality early childhood education programs in order to prevent later crime. As in many other states

throughout the country, however, Maine’s children remain underserved. Maine manages a patchwork of federal and state funds to provide early childhood education programs. The state provides partial subsidies to local school districts that choose to provide pre-kindergarten to 4-year-olds. Unfortunately, many school districts in Maine cannot provide high-quality pre-kindergarten programs because they cannot afford the local share of the cost.

Head Start is the federally-funded national program for low-income families that provides early education services for children ages 3 to 5. Maine has 13 federal Head Start grantees.<sup>39</sup> Since 1985, state funds have supplemented

federal funds to expand Head Start to serve additional eligible children.<sup>40</sup> In 2002, Maine supplemented Head Start with \$3.6 million. The Head Start programs in Maine served a total of 4,195 children in 2002.<sup>41</sup>

The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) is the principal source of federal funding for early childhood care assistance. States, which are required to provide matching funds, can use these resources to help low-income families pay for early education and after school services while the parent(s) is employed, attending educational or training programs, or looking for work.<sup>42</sup>

Though the system was designed to help all eligible children by providing subsidies, inadequate funding allows only a small minority of children to be served. Nationally, one in seven eligible children are receiving CCDBG subsidies.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, as is the case nationally, CCDBG can provide help to only one in seven eligible children in Maine.<sup>44</sup> Federal CCDBG funds to Maine totaled \$16.9 million in 2002 and the state provided \$3 million in matching funds. This total funding helped an average of 10,700 children to be served monthly.<sup>45</sup> Still, neither Head Start nor CCDBG are coming close to serving all of those who are eligible. Only 27 percent of 3 and 4-year-olds were served by state and federal pre-kindergarten programs in 2001-2002.<sup>46</sup> Many families qualify for both programs but are receiving neither.

Maine established the Two-Year Kindergarten Program with state funds to help fill the gap left by inadequate federal funding. But the Two-Year Kindergarten program enrolled just 1,440 4-year-olds in 2002. Statewide funding for the Two-Year Kindergarten Program was \$660,000 in 2002.<sup>47</sup> Total state spending on all state pre-kindergarten programs was \$2.2 million in 2001.<sup>48</sup>

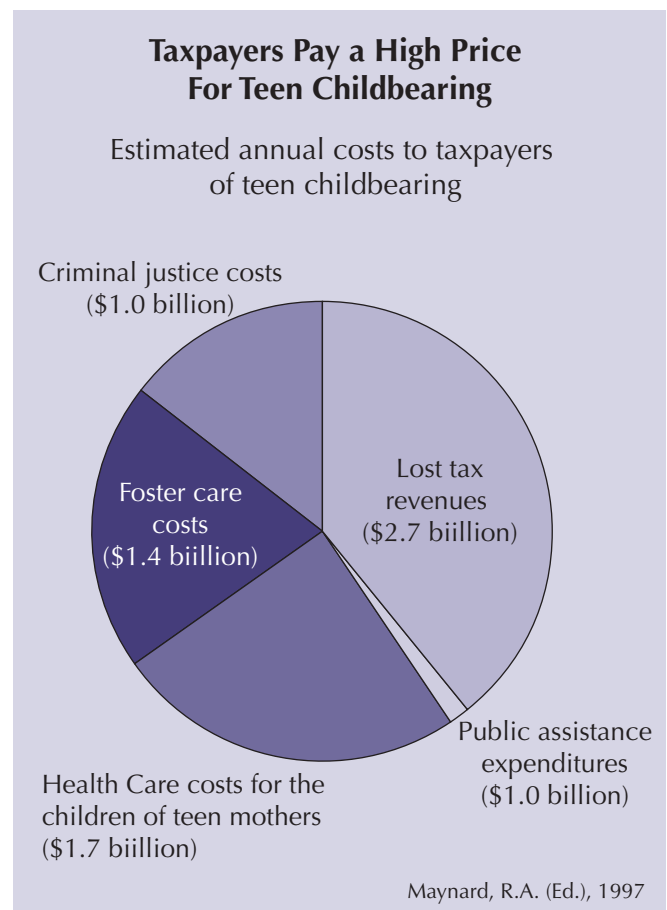
Unfortunately, many parents cannot afford to pay for pre-kindergarten services, and some can only afford to put their children in an early

childhood care setting that is more like “child storage” than early education. The cost of an early childhood program for a 4-year-old pre-kindergartener in Maine averages \$5,790 annually in urban areas. This is more than the average annual tuition at a public university in Maine. Pre-kindergarten for two children costs more than the income of a full-time minimum-wage worker in Maine.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the need for more high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, parents need help paying for them.

## High-quality Pre-kindergarten Programs Save Money

If pre-kindergarten programs can so dramatically reduce crime and teen pregnancy in the first generation, and reduce crime again in the next generation, why doesn't government provide the funds that are needed to assure that all families have affordable access to such programs?

Too frequently, the penny-wise, pound-foolish response is “we can't afford it.” The



simple fact is that investments in pre-kindergarten reduce crime and pay for themselves many times over.

High quality pre-kindergarten's reduction in teen pregnancy can prevent the substantial cost of early childbearing.

University of Pennsylvania researcher Rebecca A. Maynard estimates that teen childbearing costs taxpayers almost \$7 billion each year. Those are costs in crime, foster care, health care, public assistance, and lost tax revenues. Costs in welfare and food stamps make up the bulk of this cost. Incarceration expenses cost about \$1 billion every year to house children of teenage parents who commit crimes. The gross annual cost to the country is much more. Calculating all the related social problems that are attached to early childbearing, researchers estimate the cost is close to \$30 billion.<sup>50</sup>

Several other studies demonstrate the overall savings to taxpayers, victims of violence and the participants of high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.

- Economists found the High/Scope Perry Preschool program cut crime, welfare, and other costs so much that it saved more than \$7 (including more than \$6 in crime savings) for every \$1 invested.<sup>51</sup>

- A study of Chicago's Child-Parent Centers pre-kindergarten program found similar savings including remedial education and other costs of more than \$7 for every \$1 invested. For the 100,000 children already served by the centers, this translates to a savings of approximately \$2.6 billion.<sup>52</sup> These savings counted only the benefits to the public at large. It does not take into account participants' increased earnings or the increased contribution to economic development those earnings represent.<sup>53</sup>

Leading economists agree that high-quality pre-kindergarten is among the best investments government can make. An analysis by Arthur Rolnick, Senior Vice-President and Director of Research at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, showed that the annual return on investment in the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program was 16 percent after adjusting for inflation. Seventy-five percent of that return went to the public in the form of decreased special education expenditures, crime costs, and welfare payments. To put this in perspective, the long-term average annual return on U.S. stocks is seven percent after adjusting for inflation. Thus, an initial investment of \$1,000 in a program like the Perry Preschool is likely to return more than \$19,000 in 20 years, while the same initial investment in the stock market is likely to return less than \$4,000.<sup>54</sup> As William Gale and Isabel Sawhill of the Brookings Institution point out, investing in "early childhood education provides government and society with estimated rates of return that would make a venture capitalist envious."<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

High-quality pre-kindergarten cuts crime – generation after generation. Research shows putting kids on the right path early in life and preparing them for lifelong learning prevents teen pregnancy. This has an enormous impact on the stability of communities, as children of teen mothers are more likely than children of older mothers to drop out of high school, live in poverty, become pregnant as a teenager, and

### Quality Pre-Kindergarten Saves Money

Taxpayers, victims, and participants saved over \$7 for every \$1 invested in the Chicago Child-Parent Centers pre-kindergarten program.



For every \$1  
invested



Over \$7 was  
saved

Reynolds, et al., 2002

commit crime. These findings support a simple and logical conclusion: additional federal funds must be allocated so that all at-risk children can receive quality pre-kindergarten services.

If the federal government is serious about protecting the public and making a difference in the lives of young children, it needs to provide adequate funding to Maine so that all 3- and 4-year-olds have access to high quality pre-kindergarten.

That is why the Maine Chiefs of Police Association and the Maine Sheriffs' Association, as well as national law enforcement organizations, such as the Fraternal Order of Police and the National District Attorneys Association, are calling on elected leaders to provide all children affordable access to high-quality pre-kindergarten. Anything less compromises the future of Maine's young children and threatens the public safety for all.

## Endnotes

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