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Contact: Sally Puleo

Cell: 630-677-8673

E-mail: spuleo@fightcrime.org

Illinois Law Enforcement Leaders: Cutting Preschool Funding Today Means Bigger Prison Bill Tomorrow

Almost 10,000 Cook County Children Could Lose Preschool Under Proposed State Cuts

CHICAGO, IL (April 15, 2010) – Today Illinois law enforcement leaders called on state lawmakers to reject proposed funding cuts for early childhood programs to keep the state on track to save millions on incarceration costs.

Law enforcement leaders released a research brief indicating that high-quality early learning programs for at-risk children ages birth to five can significantly reduce crime and ultimately cut corrections costs by a quarter or more.

Under Governor Quinn's proposed budget for FY 2011, 9,582 children in Cook County could lose preschool.

"The numbers make it crystal clear: compared to incarceration, preschool is a bargain," said Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart. "We can either ensure kids get an education at a quality preschool, or we can pay a lot more down the road for him to learn his lesson behind bars. I can tell you which scenario I would rather see."

Currently in Illinois, there are nearly 72,000 incarcerated adults in jails and state prisons, with corrections costs exceeding \$1.4 billion every year.

A year of state lock-up costs taxpayers \$22,000 a year in Illinois—more expensive than a year's tuition, room, and board at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which costs around \$21,000. The research brief from Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois estimates that Illinois would save about \$350 million in taxpayer dollars if it cut prison costs by a quarter by investing in early learning.

"Early childhood programs like preschool are key to the development of young men and women, so leaving these programs in place is vital to keeping kids engaged and out of trouble later on in life." said Chicago Police Superintendent Jody Weis.

With the General Assembly in the midst of budget negotiations, law enforcement officials are urging state policymakers to reject a proposed \$54 million cut to the Early Childhood Block Grant in the Illinois State Board of Education budget. Combined with cuts made in 2009, preschools now face a 24 percent reduction in state-funding. As a result, nearly 23,000 children statewide could lose their spots

in state-funded preschool programs and almost 600 highly-qualified early childhood teachers will lose their jobs.

The research brief was released in a news conference Thursday by Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, Channahon Police Chief Ignacio “Joe” Pena, Mundelein Police Chief Ray Rose, Sangamon County Sheriff Neil Williamson, and Ogle County State’s Attorney John “Ben” Roe.

The law enforcement leaders emphasized the cost-saving benefits of investing in high-quality early childhood education and care, especially for young, at-risk children. Researchers at the Federal Reserve in Minneapolis found that the Perry Preschool program had an annual rate of return on investment of 16 percent. The majority of the cost savings in the Perry study came from reductions in crime and incarceration.

“The research speaks for itself. We can either invest in preschool classrooms now and prevent crime, or wind up spending more on prison cells and cleaning up after tragedies,” said Rose. “Early childhood education is one of the best deals around, and it would be a real mistake to lose sight of that.”

A long-term study of the high-quality Perry Preschool in Michigan found that by age 40, the kids left out of the program were 85 percent more likely to be sentenced to jail or prison. Another study detailed in the report showed that kids who did not attend Chicago’s Child-Parent Centers were 24 percent more likely to be incarcerated than similar kids who did attend.

The law enforcement leaders said that more support is needed at the state and federal level to ensure that quality early childhood programs are available and affordable to more families. Costs for enrolling young children in early learning programs can run as high as \$7,300 a year, which many families are unable to afford. Even before the cuts that began last year, there remained more than 117,000 Illinois 3- and 4-year-olds in families who cannot afford to pay for quality preschool on their own.

Over the past eight years, Illinois has made great strides in expanding preschool opportunities for families. With the expansion of the Preschool for All program, Illinois has added over 43,300 slots for 3-and 4-year olds, increasing the number of children enrolled in state-funded preschool to over 95,000.

In Cook County, 39,923 children are enrolled in state-funded preschool.

Dart, Weis, Rose and the law enforcement officials participating in the news conference are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS ILLINOIS, an anti-crime organization led by over 300 police chiefs, sheriffs, state’s attorneys, leaders of police officer organizations and crime victims.

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