FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA
ILLINOIS

xxx, 2020

Honorable J.B. Pritzker, Governor
Honorable Michael Madigan, Speaker, Illinois House of Representatives
Honorable XX XXXX, President, Illinois Senate
Honorable Jim Durkin, Minority Leader, Illinois House of Representatives
Honorable Bill Brady, Minority Leader, Illinois Senate
Members of the Illinois General Assembly

Dear Illinois Leaders:

Those of us on Illinois' front lines in the fight against crime work hard every day to take criminals off the streets. But we also know that we will never arrest and imprison our way out of Illinois' crime problem, nor can we afford to do so.

We must prevent crime before it happens through proven strategies that reach children and youth. Doing so not only spares the state the enormous financial burden of cleaning up after crime, it also spares countless Illinoisans from the tragedy of becoming victims.

That's why law enforcement leaders from across the state have consistently called for increased support of key programs for children and youth. The foundation of a safe, fiscally-stable state is the programs that help ensure children will become responsible, productive, and law-abiding adults.

As you draw-up and enact an FY2021 budget in the coming weeks, we — the members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *ILLINOIS* — urge you to focus on the strategies outlined below that will help deliver a more secure and prosperous future for Illinois:

(1) **Improve voluntary preschool and birth-to-3 opportunities by increasing the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) to at least $694 million in FY21.** High-quality preschool and birth-to-3 programs can help dramatically reduce future crime. While our state has made real progress in support of these programs, we still have a long way to go before all families have access to a quality preschool program for their 3- and 4-year-olds. The effects of this underinvestment are seen as early as kindergarten, when only one in four kindergartners is deemed "ready" for school by their teachers. The consequences can continue all the way through school and into adulthood, including reduced high school completion and increased encounters with our criminal justice system. Illinois has an opportunity with the FY2021 budget to take a significant step toward a much better future for young children and our communities, through an additional $150 million investment in the Early Childhood Block Grant in the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

(2) **Increase support for home-visiting programs in the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) budget** for new parents of at-risk children by appropriating **$20.9 million** in support for **Healthy Families Illinois** and **Parents Too Soon.** Voluntary home-visiting provides "coaching" for new parents of very young, at-risk children. These community-based programs are among the most effective strategies for reducing exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and have also shown success with helping addicted parents achieve sobriety. Funding for these highly effective programs has remained stagnant for nearly a decade and we continue to reach only a fraction of the families who could benefit.

(4) **Increase funding for afterschool programs in the IDHS and ISBE budgets.** Youth-development programs can help effectively counteract what police call the "prime time for juvenile crime" during the hours directly after the school day ends. Law enforcement leaders support restoring funding for Teen REACH in the IDHS budget to $19.6 million, a level that can provide support for more of our communities that need safe and enriching places for young people in those risky after-school hours. We also urge support for a request by the ACT Now Coalition to ISBE to fund after-school programs in our lowest-performing school districts.

(5) **Continue funding of $6.37 million for juvenile Redeploy Illinois to cut recidivism for young offenders.** Redeploy Illinois reduces recidivism and saves money by contracting with counties to provide support and accountability for juvenile offenders in their home communities, instead of sending them to a Department of Juvenile Justice prison facility. This highly effective initiative continues to recover from the state budget impasse, with many counties reluctant to reengage in an effort that suffered greatly when bills were not being paid. In FY21, the Department of Human Services should continue to focus on bringing formerly participating counties back into the program as well as working to expand to more counties in the future.

(6) **Fully support the DHS Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) in FY21 while continuing to rebuild participation.** State child care assistance for low-income, working families has long helped parents find reliable, educational settings for children's care while they are on the job. These programs are also a significant component of the early learning system. We commend the state for recent progress strengthening CCAP access, quality, and affordability. CCAP participation, however, remains significantly lower than a few years ago. **Our request for FY21 is increased general revenue funding for CCAP to $482 million** to enhance quality and to increase the number of families receiving help paying for child care expenses.

When it comes to safeguarding our cities and counties, there is no substitute for rigorous law enforcement. But we, the undersigned, also know from years of crime-fighting experience and thorough research that we must give kids a solid foundation in life through the proven methods we have detailed above.

We thank you for this opportunity to provide input, and we look forward to working with you, our Illinois policy leaders, toward realizing these crucial investments in building a safe and flourishing future for our children, families, and communities. We would welcome discussing these priorities with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,