



Nearly 5,000 Police Chiefs, Sheriffs,
Prosecutors, other Law Enforcement
Leaders, and Violence Survivors
Preventing Crime and Violence

Dear Florida Legislator:

As law enforcement leaders, we see first-hand the devastating impact substance abuse and mental illness has on Florida families and communities. We typically are the first on the scene when there is a car accident, drug overdose, suicide and homicide. And we too often enter homes where a child has been abused or neglected.

The nearly 5,000 police chiefs, sheriff, prosecutors and violence survivors that are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS nationwide – including 90 in Florida – want to prevent these crimes from ever happening by ensuring children and their parents have access to effective treatment for mental illness and substance abuse problems.

Right now in Tallahassee, you and your colleagues are debating whether to extend health coverage to the one million adults through expanding Medicaid. We're not health care experts and are not taking sides in this debate. But what we do know is mental illness and substance abuse problems left untreated result in a much higher likelihood of individuals committing a crime.

In Florida, approximately 700 individuals die because of drunk driving, 2,700 individuals die of unintentional drug overdoses, 2,900 individuals commit suicide and 970 individuals are murdered each year. Many of these deaths would have been preventable if these individuals had been screened, diagnosed and treated for mental illness and substance abuse problems as early in life as possible.

Three family interventions widely used across the United States, often paid for through health insurance, help parents learn effective strategies of setting boundaries and reinforcing positive behavior to keep their seriously troubled teens from getting into more trouble due to aggression, substance abuse, or out-of-control and defiant behaviors. But despite programs like Florida KidCare that provides health insurance for children at little to no cost to low- to middle-income families, many are not enrolled because **parents without insurance are three times more likely to have uninsured children.**

The health and well being of a child is also dependent on parents getting screened, diagnosed and treated for substance abuse. Each year, **in Florida there are 53,500 confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect. Research shows that up to two-thirds of all child abuse and neglect cases involve parents who abuse drugs or alcohol.** In addition, post-partum depression can also increase the risk of child abuse and neglect, and studies show that 40 to 60 percent of low-income mothers experience depressive symptoms after birth.

Getting parents treated for substance abuse and new mothers screened for post-partum depression is important for our communities' long-term safety: research shows that being abused or neglected almost doubles the odds that a child will commit a crime by age 19 when compared to youth from similar backgrounds.



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Screenings for substance abuse can also have an impact from the very start. Children born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome also have an increased likelihood of committing future crime. **One study found that 60 percent of adults who were born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome had trouble with the law, and 35 percent had been incarcerated.** When more women of child-bearing age are getting screened and treated for substance abuse problems, we increase the likelihood their children will grow up living crime-free lives.

As law enforcement leaders, we want you to know all the facts on the ways that access to mental illness and substance abuse treatment can impact keeping our communities safe by reducing crime and fatalities.

We leave it to you to decide how to make sure all Floridians who need help for mental illness and substance abuse problems have access to effective treatment.