



Federal Investments in Anti-Poverty and Early Childhood Programs Enhance Public Safety in Pennsylvania

Increasing access to high-quality preschool programs and extending the enhanced Child Tax Credit would yield enormous benefits

The law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids know that one of the best ways to keep children from becoming involved in crime later on is to make sure they have a foundation for success in their earliest years. By providing access to high-quality preschool education for kids today, we can see less crime and incarceration in the future, while reaping enormous economic and societal benefits. Research has also shown that policies that lift children and families out of poverty, such as the Child Tax Credit (CTC), can lead to improved school performance, increased educational attainment, fewer risky behaviors, and less crime. Federal policymakers must act now to help our country realize these public safety benefits by investing in early education for our nation's children and extending the enhanced CTC.

High-quality early education helps prevent crime

Research demonstrates that the experiences children have in their earliest years, during the most critical period of brain growth, set the foundation for future development and success.¹ Voluntary, quality preschool education can improve academic performance—including high school graduation—and reduce the risk that participants will become involved in crime later. Decades of research show the short- and long-term benefits of high-quality preschool for children's development, particularly for children from families with low incomes.²

School readiness and success

Students who participated in Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts program outperformed their peers in language and math skills in kindergarten, showing four to five months of additional learning.³ Children who attend



high-quality preschool are also less likely to be held back in school⁴ and have higher reading and math scores.⁵ Preschool participants also have an increased probability of graduating from high school.⁶ The fact that six out of 10 prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma illustrates the connection between education and crime prevention.⁷

Decreased behavior problems

Pennsylvania's Pre-K Counts Public-Private Partnership program (the precursor to the current Pre-K Counts program) cut—from 22 percent to 4 percent—the number of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behaviors.⁸ This led to fewer of those children needing special education.

Reduction in crime and incarceration

Some long-term studies directly examine the link between preschool participation

and crime prevention. A recent MIT study of the Boston preschool program found that enrollees were less likely to have been incarcerated in a juvenile facility during high school, compared to non-enrollees.⁹ By age 24, people served by the Chicago Child-Parent Centers (CPC) early education program were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail or prison.¹⁰

Preschool's economic benefits

An independent cost-benefit analysis of universal preschool programs showed that they can return, on average, a “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than \$15,000 for every child served. The benefits accrue due to increased test scores (associated with higher earnings in adulthood), as well as reduced costs to society from preventing children being held back in school or needing special education.¹¹ A previous cost-benefit analysis by the same researchers found that the “profit” increased to more than \$22,000 per child served when preschool programs targeted children from low-income families and the calculation included the programs' benefits due to crime reduction.¹²

Applying the estimated per child net benefits to the approximately six million additional children who would be served by the preschool provision in the Build Back Better Act,¹³ our nation could realize a return on investment of \$90 billion over the lifetime of these children.¹⁴ The estimated benefit for Pennsylvania is \$3.7 billion.¹⁵

Income supports also improve child outcomes

Research shows that increasing families' incomes through tax credits is associated with improved educational outcomes for



children, thereby improving their future opportunities. One study estimated that a \$1,000 increase in income due to the EITC raised math and reading test scores, particularly for children from disadvantaged families.¹⁶ Another study estimated that such increases in test scores boost adult income.¹⁷ Additionally, research has found that programs that reduce childhood poverty, such as the Child Tax Credit (CTC), improve children's long-term health outcomes.¹⁸ There is also evidence that income assistance policies can reduce risky behaviors like substance abuse¹⁹ and decrease the likelihood of criminal behavior.²⁰ In sum, policies that increase family income, including the CTC, can help children from

disadvantaged families both in childhood and in the long term.²¹

The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) expanded the CTC and made it fully refundable for the first time.²² This is especially important for low-income families with children, who often do not have any federal income tax liability.²³ The credit amount was increased from \$2000 per child to \$3000 per child for children ages 6-17 and \$3600 per child for children under age 6.²⁴ Additionally, families can now receive advance payments on their credit.

Estimates suggest that these changes to the CTC may reduce the total number of children in poverty by 35 to 45 percent²⁵



and preliminary research already shows impact.²⁶ Before the passage of the ARPA, 27 million children (including approximately half of all Black, Latino, and rural children) did not receive the maximum credit because their parents did not earn enough to incur tax liability. The new refundability of the CTC solves that problem.²⁷ **However, this CTC expansion will expire at the end of 2021, cutting benefits to 2.4 million**

Pennsylvania children and leaving 310,000 of them at risk of slipping back below the poverty line or deeper into poverty.²⁸

Federal policymakers must act now to bolster investments in children

High-quality early education provides one of the best ways to set children on the path to success and help them avoid becoming involved in crime later. Meanwhile, tax credits are one of the strongest tools that have proven effective in helping low-income families escape poverty and improve children's outcomes. Congress should act during this unique moment to bolster the early education system and to continue the expansion and refundability of CTC in order to reap economic and societal benefits, including increased public safety.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

Thousands of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors and violence survivors protecting public safety by promoting solutions that steer kids away from crime

Council for a Strong America is a national, bipartisan nonprofit that unites five organizations comprised of law enforcement leaders, retired admirals and generals, business executives, faith leaders, and prominent coaches and athletes who promote solutions that ensure our next generation of Americans will be successful, productive members of society.

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Endnotes

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