FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

Written Testimony of Dan James, Prosecuting Attorney
for Morgan County, West Virginia
On behalf of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
Prepared for the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
Thursday, May 18th, 2023

Thank you Chairwoman Baldwin, Ranking Member Capito, and Appropriations Committee members for the opportunity to share the law enforcement perspective on addressing the child care crisis in West Virginia and nationwide. My name is Dan James, Prosecuting Attorney for Morgan County, West Virginia. Additionally, I am a member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a group of over 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, and attorneys general from every state in the country advocating for evidence-based solutions that reduce crime and steer children toward success. My fellowFight Crime: Invest in Kids members and I urge Congress to protect and strengthen programs like **Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)**, **Preschool Development Grants, Birth to Five (PDG B-5),** and **Head Start and Early Head Start**, which are essential tools in efforts to reduce juvenile involvement in the criminal justice system and guide the next generation towards positive outcomes in the long term.

Last year, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids released a research brief discussing the importance of having a solid foundation for educational success in a child's earliest years. This brief highlighted an independent cost-benefit analysis of universal preschool programs that found approximately $3 were saved in net profit for every dollar invested into preschool programs. If preschool programs were expanded to include the approximately six million additional children who are not served now, our nation could realize a return on investment of $90 billion. In West Virginia alone, an additional 28,000 children could be served with expanded preschool programs, saving an estimated $420 million.

Our research brief shows investments in the youngest in our society can improve academic performance—including high school graduation—and reduce the risk that participants will become involved in crime later. Studies show attendance in preschool

programs increases school readiness and success, reduces likelihood of behavioral infractions at all grade levels, and is linked to long term crime reduction.

From the law enforcement perspective, no police chief, sheriff, or prosecutor wants to slam the book on any child. They want to uplift them and allow them to prosper so the child benefits, the family benefits, and the community benefits. We as law enforcement leaders know that a prime way to reduce crime in the long run is strong investments in high-quality programs that allow children to develop properly and prepare them for school and life.

To leverage the return on investment we see from early childhood programs, we must increase funding for Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Preschool Development Grants, Birth to Five (PDG B-5), and Head Start and Early Head Start for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024.

By increasing funding for programs like CCDBG, PDG B-5, and Head Start and Early Head Start, we can begin to counteract this crisis and provide children with the tools they need to steer away from crime and towards life-long success.

In West Virginia, the lack of child care and early learning programs also hurts the economy. According to a new report by the business leaders of ReadyNation, the lack of child care in West Virginia causes economic damage of $464 million per year in lost wages, productivity, and revenue, and that's just for kids under age 3. The infant-toddler child care crisis has doubled in the last four years, and the damage is $122 billion per year nationwide. Two thirds of West Virginians live in a child care "desert," with more than three young children for each licensed child care slot.

For FY24, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids asks to increase funding to $12.4 Billion for Child Care and Development Block Grants (CCDBG). These grants provide a flexible child care subsidy or "voucher" that parents can use at a wide variety of licensed providers. In West Virginia, CCDBG serves only 19.0 percent of eligible children due to funding constraints, leaving a lot of families without affordable options for high-quality child care. Ensuring that a child is taken care of properly and not neglected is a priority of law enforcement leaders everywhere. Beginning with infants and toddlers, the first few years of a child's life are the most important to brain development, and we must be

investing in ways to ensure they can develop in a safe and secure environment to promote later in life success.

For FY24, we request that the Committee increase funding to $500 Million for Preschool Development Grants, Birth to Five (PDG B-5). PDG B-5 provides competitive grants designed to improve school readiness among children from families with low incomes, smooth transitions from early childhood programs into elementary school, and leverage new and current efforts to to increase access to programs, improve program quality, and maximize parental choice. West Virginia's Department of Health and Human Resources recently won a $2 million grant from PDG B-5. Currently, West Virginia has 11,981 children enrolled in pre-K. West Virginia has a universal pre-k program that serves all 4 year olds (and some 3 year olds with special needs. The universal program meets 9 out of 10 quality standards, but additional funding would ensure more children get slots and the opportunity to benefit from quality early education. Setting up the foundation for success in school is essential to preventing behavioral issues that lead to interactions with the criminal justice system.

For FY24, we ask the Committee to increase funding to $17.47 Billion for Head Start and Early Head Start. Head Start and Early Head start are programs that support children and families by providing high-quality early learning and wraparound services to help them rise out of poverty. In West Virginia, 7,804 program slots are available with only 1,086 of those slots for Early Head Start. Only seven percent of eligible children in West Virginia are served by Early Head Start, and 29 percent of eligible children are served by Head Start. Wraparound services such as home visits, behavioral screenings, and preventative dental care are key components of this program that reduce crime by preventing child abuse and neglect which we know is linked to a child's future involvement with crime. By investing the dollars now, we prevent their interactions with me in the courtroom down the line, saving the taxpayers money. If we are serious about crime prevention, we need to create positive environments for children to thrive and break cycles of abuse and neglect.

I would like to again thank this subcommittee for the opportunity to elevate the importance of funding programs that combat the child care crisis. Children deserve the highest standards of care to ensure they stay on a path toward success. Federal funding for programs like these help ensure these children develop the tools necessary to succeed in this ever changing world.

Historically, supporting children and their development has been a bipartisan issue. This year is no different, with a record number of Republicans and Democrats supporting early childhood programs in Congress.

I look forward to seeing the bipartisanship continue as you look at critical investments for the upcoming fiscal year.