



ILLINOIS

March 14, 2024

Honorable Emanuel “Chris” Welch, Speaker, Illinois House of Representatives
Honorable Don Harmon, President, Illinois Senate
Honorable Tony McCombie, Minority Leader, Illinois House of Representatives
Honorable John Curran, Minority Leader, Illinois Senate
Members of the Illinois General Assembly

Dear Illinois Leaders:

We write as members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids-Illinois — a bipartisan, nonprofit group of 350 Illinois police chiefs, sheriffs, and state’s attorneys who are part of a network totaling 5,000+ law enforcement leaders nationwide. Given many decades of experience, our members know the value of prevention-oriented efforts in strengthening public safety. To counter crime and violence, our state must invest wisely in research-proven programs shown to be effective in putting children on track for success in life, a path leading away from trouble and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Sadly, too many kids still lack services that could put them on that path. According to the Illinois State Board of Education, in fall 2022, only three out of 10 kindergarteners entered school fully prepared for success in early math, language and literacy, and social-emotional development. That school-readiness figure drops further among many children from low-income households, among several other demographic groups. Studies consistently show that kids who start school behind tend to fall further behind, whereas high-quality early childhood programs can more equitably increase their chances of graduating on time and avoiding academic and behavioral problems.

For these reasons, we write with crime-prevention recommendations for the state budget in FY2025.

Our hopes include taking the next steps in following and building upon the multi-year Smart Start plan for strengthening birth-to-5 priorities, a path on which Illinois embarked in the FY24 budget reflecting several key suggestions of the bipartisan Early Childhood Funding Commission. Another of the Commission’s 2021 recommendations envisioned the creation of a single state agency overseeing early care and education programs, consolidating functions from the current, three-agency approach that poses too many bureaucratic barriers for families and service providers, alike. We support the Governor’s proposal for doing so (SB3777/HB5451) with an initial investment of \$13 million.

In collaboration with many policy-and-advocacy partners, we ask that you and other state leaders increase FY25 resources for:

- **The Early Childhood Block Grant by \$75 million**, per the budget recommendations of both the Governor and the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) — This could accommodate the addition of 5,000 more preK slots for 3- and 4-year-olds, as well as expansion of birth-to-3 Prevention

Initiative services. We want to emphasize the critical nature of further strengthening investments in the support and compensation of our early childhood workforce and similar measures to balance improvements in programs' quality, access, equity, and stability. In addition to this growth in base grant funding, we join partners in recommending greater resources for Infant/Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation services; young children with social-emotional developmental delays or behavioral challenges are especially at risk of struggles throughout their school years and beyond, so supporting these young learners is a key prevention strategy.

- **Home-visiting programs by \$5 million**, in the Department of Human Services (DHS), as the Governor has suggested — This could extend vital “coaching” to hundreds more households of new and expectant parents who seek help in supporting their children’s optimum development. New resources also would provide the opportunity to boost compensation for underpaid providers. These services have been shown to help curb abuse and neglect, as well as reduce the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that can lead to many negative outcomes for kids.
- **Early Intervention services by up to \$40 million in DHS** (\$34 million more than the introduced budget proposal) — Such growth is necessary to bolster compensation of the therapists who provide physical, speech, occupational, and other support for infants and toddlers experiencing developmental disabilities or delays, and help strengthen such children’s chances of thriving in life. Buttressing this program’s capacity would help reduce an alarming rise in service delays.
- **Child care services by a total of \$158.5 million in the DHS budget**, per the Governor’s FY25 plan — The Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) provides crucial assistance to the working parents of approximately 130,000 children statewide. High-quality child care has consistently been shown to improve educational and behavioral outcomes for children, which in turn reduces the likelihood that they will become involved in the criminal justice system later in life. An increase of \$36.5 million would help accommodate expansion in CCAP caseloads that are still bouncing back from both the effects of the COVID pandemic and 2015 cuts in program eligibility. Another \$122 million would strengthen the Smart Start Workforce Compensation Grants launched last year to stabilize and bolster the under-supported child care workforce — the “workforce behind our entire workforce.”

We close with a call for similarly reinforcing two other important priorities for curbing crime and violence. High-quality afterschool programs are in desperate need of greater resources to meet the out-of-school needs of our state’s youth, so we join others in seeking at least **\$6 million of additional funding for Teen REACH** and a new, **\$50 million commitment to community-school efforts**. Similarly, we hope to see our state take further steps to shore-up the reach and quality of the **Redeploy Illinois (Juvenile)** initiative of community-based alternatives to incarceration for criminal justice-involved youth, including stronger compensation for its staff.

We appreciate your support for research-based, public safety prerogatives that focus on strengthening the well-being of children and families. Please do not hesitate to contact Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois Director Sean Noble (snoble@fightcrime.org) if we can be a resource to you and other state policy leaders in addressing prevention-oriented investments in young children. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The undersigned members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids-Illinois

Hon. Thomas Dart
Cook County Sheriff

Chief Mitchell Davis
Hazel Crest Police

Hon. Eric Weis
Kendall County State's Attorney

Hon. Robert Berlin
DuPage County State's Attorney

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Crystal Lake Police

Hon. Jack Campbell
Sangamon County Sheriff

Chief Fred Hayes
Elwood Police

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Christian County Sheriff

Hon. Jeff Lower
Tazewell County Sheriff

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Chief Schenita Stewart
Evanston Police

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