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

February 5, 2018

Honorable Bruce Rauner, Governor
Honorable Michael Madigan, Speaker, Illinois House of Representatives
Honorable John Cullerton, 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:

As Illinois sheriffs, police chiefs, state's attorneys, crime survivors, and leaders of law enforcement organizations, we work every day to combat crime, lock-up criminals, and establish safer communities. But we firmly believe there is a great deal we can accomplish proactively, creating the conditions that prevent people from engaging in criminal activity in the first place. That is why we support sound, research-based strategies — such as early childhood and after-school programs, and community-based diversion initiatives for troubled youth — that get young people off to the right start in life. By focusing on these strategies in the FY2019 budget, state leaders can make a down payment on a more secure and prosperous future for Illinois.

With the FY2018 budget and accompanying, bipartisan legislation — such as the bill to reduce preschool expulsions — you have helped return early childhood education to the forefront of efforts to invest in our state's children and families. In boosting access to and the quality of preschool, you have shown a commitment to a major component of effective crime prevention.

As you draw-up and enact an FY2019 budget in the coming weeks, we — the members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *ILLINOIS* — urge you to build further upon these efforts by adopting the following state budget and policy priorities:

(1) Improve voluntary preschool and birth-to-3 opportunities by increasing the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) to at least $493.73 million, reflecting the $50 million increase requested by the State Board of Education. Three straight years of funding boosts have restored deep cuts, expanded full-day preschool availability for thousands of our most challenged preschoolers, restored essential quality components in preK, and put Illinois on the road to once again become a national leader in early childhood education. A $50 million increase will keep us on track with Illinois' five-year state plan to boost early learning with the help of federal resources. Anything less than this funding level will put the state at risk of losing those critical federal preschool dollars.

(2) Maintain home-visiting programs in the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) budget for new parents of at-risk children, by appropriating at least $16.91 million in support for **Healthy Families Illinois** and **Parents Too Soon.** These "parent-coaching" programs have shown success with helping addicted parents achieve sobriety, and are among the most effective — and cost-effective — strategies for reducing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) such as abuse and neglect. As a result, home visiting is proven to significantly reduce arrests for both mothers in the program and for their children later in life. Resource limitations historically prevented these services from reaching even 10 percent of the households that qualified for their assistance – and the state's recent budget impasse only exacerbated those shortfalls. Further underfunding threatens the loss of vital, federal resources for the families of at-risk infants and toddlers.

(3) Increase funding for the Teen REACH after-school program in the IDHS budget to $13.8 million. We commend Governor Rauner and legislators for enacting SB2407 in 2016, which reflected overwhelming, bipartisan support for quality after-school, and ensured that Teen REACH has a permanent, statutory home in state law. FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS now requests that funding for this key crime-prevention program be restored to FY15 levels, following years of cuts and neglect. Quality after-school provides a safe and enriching place to be for more than 10,000 young Illinoisans when the school day ends; law-enforcement leaders know from first-hand experience that Teen REACH helps youth during the hours known as "prime time for juvenile crime."

(4) Continue funding of $4.88 million for juvenile Redeploy Illinois to cut recidivism for young offenders. This IDHS program prevents crime and saves money by contracting with counties to provide support and promote accountability for juvenile offenders in their home communities. The budget impasse severely impacted Redeploy Illinois, with half of participating counties dropping-out at one point. To restore this remarkable initiative — and to prevent a ballooning number of kids from ending-up in expensive and less effective state facilities — we must, at a minimum, maintain recent funding levels.

(5) Fully support the DHS Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). We commend state policymakers for restoring CCAP eligibility for parents enrolled in education and training programs, and for working parents earning up to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. We urge state leaders to now ensure the program's resources are sufficient to fully support those moves and make CCAP viable for the children and families who need it. State assistance for low-income, working families has long provided reliable, safe settings for children's care while parents are on the job — often, the same out-of-school hours known for juvenile crime. High-quality care for younger children can be as educational as preschool programs and, as a significant component of the early learning system, is proven to cut crime.

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

We thank you for this opportunity to provide input in setting key state priorities for FY19, and we look forward to working with you, our Illinois policy leaders, toward realizing these crucial investments in building a safe and prosperous future for our children, families, and communities. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these priorities with you at your earliest convenience. Please contact State Director Tim Carpenter at tcarpenter@fightcrime.org or 312-962-4850 to make arrangements.

Sincerely,

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