



I'm the Guy You Pay Later

Law enforcement leaders urge policymakers to cut crime by investing in high-quality early care and education

Our nation's jails are full of people serving time for serious and costly crimes. But it doesn't have to be that way. Providing at-risk kids with high-quality early learning opportunities through pre-K, Head Start, and child care programs can reduce the human and fiscal costs of crime in the future.

As law enforcement leaders, our number one priority is protecting the safety of our communities. We do this by arresting, prosecuting and, when necessary, incarcerating people who commit crimes. But ultimately our best opportunity to improve public safety is to keep people from becoming involved in crime in the first place. We currently spend \$75 billion each year on corrections nationwide to incarcerate more than two million criminals.¹ The choice is simple: Pay for high-quality early care and education programs now, or pay far more later for the costs of crime.

“ We need strong investments in high-quality programs that keep kids on the path toward success so they won't end up in our squad cars as adults.”

Chief Art Acevedo

Houston, TX



High-Quality Early Care and Education: A Path to Less Crime

The path we set children upon, in their earliest years, can make a huge difference. Research has shown that high-quality early education and care from birth through pre-kindergarten will result in more successful outcomes:

Less child abuse and neglect: The Chicago Child-Parent Center (CPC) is an early learning program that has served over 100,000 children and followed a sample of them up to age 35. CPC cut child abuse and neglect in half for the children served, compared with similar children from families that did not participate.²

Fewer behavior problems: Pennsylvania's public pre-K program cut the proportion of children at risk for problematic social and self-control behavior from 22 percent to four percent.³ A longitudinal study of more than 1,300 children found that children in higher-quality child care had significantly lower levels of behavior problems at age 15 compared to children in lower-quality child care.⁴

Better school outcomes:

- **Improvements in math and reading that persist:** North Carolina's Smart Start (child care) and More at Four (preschool) initiatives found that the children in counties that spent more per student were two months ahead in reading and 1.5 months ahead in math by fifth grade when compared with children in counties that spent less.⁵ Participants in the Tulsa, Oklahoma Head Start program had higher

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achievement scores in math in seventh grade, compared to non-participants.⁶

- **Less special education:** New Jersey, which has followed its state preschool children through the fourth and fifth grades, found that the children served were 31 percent less likely to be placed in special education than a control group.⁷
- **Not held back in school:** Participants in Michigan's state pre-K were held back in school 51 percent less often than non-participants.⁸ New Jersey's pre-K program found its children were held back 40 percent less often.⁹

Fewer dropouts: The Chicago CPC program reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation rates by age 20 among its participants.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Michigan's pre-K program reported a 35 percent increase in graduates.¹¹ And a recent analysis of Head Start found that siblings who attended the program had an increased probability of graduating from high school, compared to their siblings who did not attend.¹² Moreover, six out of 10 prisoners nationwide do not have a high school diploma, which has far-reaching implications for their employment prospects after incarceration.¹³

Less crime and fewer prisoners: Children not served by the Chicago CPC program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.¹⁴ By age 24, the people served by the Chicago CPC were 20 percent less likely to have served time in a jail or prison.¹⁵ A recent study of Oklahoma's universal Pre-K program found the program decreases the likelihood that black children are later charged with a crime at age 18 or 19 for both misdemeanors and felonies.¹⁶

Economists Enrico Moretti and Lance Lochner studied the relationship over time between changes in graduation rates and crime. They concluded that a 10 percentage-point increase in graduation rates—going from 50 percent to 60 percent, for example—reduces murder and assault rates by about 20 percent.

Conclusion

As law enforcement leaders, our job is to put those who commit serious crimes behind bars. But **we all agree that a better and less expensive way to stop crime going forward is to prevent as many young children as possible from growing up to become involved in crime in the first place.** When we support what works for disadvantaged children, we put them—and our country—on a different, safer path.¹⁷

High-quality childcare, Head Start, and state pre-K programs are critical to ensuring our kids get the best start possible. We urge state and federal policymakers to invest in early care and education programs as a matter of public safety.

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=5239>
- 2 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17679653>
- 3 <http://www.heinz.org/userfiles/library/specs%20for%20pkc%202009%20final%20research%20report%20113009.pdf>
- 4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2938040/>
- 5 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/cdev.12645>
- 6 <http://captulsa.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/CROCUSPolicyBriefAugust2016.pdf>
- 7 <http://nieer.org/research-report/201311apples205th20grade-pdf>
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- 17 https://www.jstor.org/stable/3592774?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

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, pastors, 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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