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

February 1, 2019

Honorable J.B. Pritzker, 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:

Please accept our congratulations on being chosen by your fellow Illinoisans as their voices in state government. 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 also is a great deal we can accomplish proactively, creating the conditions that prevent people from criminal activity in the first place. This 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. Please keep in mind that the strength and safety of our communities in the future are often grounded in the priorities and investments that you will be making during your tenures in Springfield.

As you draw-up and enact an FY2020 budget in the coming weeks, we — the members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *ILLINOIS* — urge you to focus on the strategies outlined below that will help deliver a more secure and prosperous future for Illinois:

(1) **Improve voluntary preschool and birth-to-3 opportunities by increasing the Early Childhood Block Grant (ECBG) to at least $644 million in FY20.** High-quality preschool and birth-to-3 programs can help dramatically reduce future crime. While our state has made real progress in support of these programs, we still have a long way to go before all families have access to quality preschool for their 3- and 4-year-olds. The consequences of this underinvestment are seen as early as kindergarten, when only one in four Illinois kindergartners is deemed "ready" for school by a recent assessment. The consequences continue all the way through school and into adulthood, with reduced high school completion and, for too many, encounters with our criminal justice system. Illinois has an opportunity with the FY2020 budget to take a significant step forward through an additional $150 million investment in this grant, which includes both funding for prekindergarten and evidence-based programs for at-risk infants and toddlers.

(2) **Increase support for home-visiting programs in the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) budget** for new parents of at-risk children, by appropriating **$33.82 million** in support for **Healthy Families Illinois** and **Parents Too Soon.** Voluntary home-visiting provides "coaching" for new parents of very young, at-risk children. These community-based programs are among the most effective strategies for reducing exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and have also shown success with helping addicted parents achieve sobriety. Funding for these highly effective programs has remained stagnant for nearly a decade and we continue to reach only about one in 10 families who could benefit.

(3) **Increase space capacity for early childhood programs by including at least $250 million for early childhood construction and repair in any new capital bill.** In far too many of Illinois' most-challenged communities, the lack of facilities for early childhood classrooms (either in school districts or for community-based providers) may well be the biggest obstacle to reaching more children with quality early childhood programs. In the state's last capital program, there were nearly $500 million in requests for funding of early childhood facilities, but only $45 million available.

(4) Increase funding for the Teen REACH after-school program in the IDHS budget to $20 million. Youth-development programs can help effectively deal with what police call the "prime time for juvenile crime" during out-of-school hours. Law enforcement leaders support restoring funding for Teen REACH to a level that can provide support for more of our communities that need safe and enriching places for our young people in those risky after-school hours – a level of support these programs used to enjoy.

(5) Continue funding of $5.37 million for juvenile Redeploy Illinois to cut recidivism for young offenders. Redeploy Illinois reduces recidivism and saves money by contracting with counties to provide support and accountability for juvenile offenders in their home communities, instead of sending them to a Department of Juvenile Justice prison facility. The state budget impasse continues to have a negative impact on this highly effective initiative, leaving many counties reluctant to reengage. In FY20, the Department of Human Services should focus on bringing formerly participating counties back into the program as well as working on a plan to expand to more counties in the future.

(6) Fully support the DHS Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) in FY20 while rebuilding participation. State child care assistance for low-income, working families has long helped parents find reliable, educational settings for children's care while they are on the job. These programs are also a significant component of the early learning system. We commend the state for restoring CCAP eligibility for parents enrolled in education and training programs, restoring eligibility for working parents to 185 percent of the federal poverty level, and implementing 12-month eligibility. CCAP participation, however, remains significantly lower than even a few years ago. **Our request for FY20 is to maintain general revenue funding at $402 million** to allow for continued quality enhancements and work to increase the number of families receiving help paying for child care expenses.

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 give kids a solid foundation in life through the proven methods we have detailed above.

We thank you for this opportunity to provide input, and we look forward to working with you, our Illinois policy leaders, toward realizing these crucial investments in building a safe and flourishing future for our children, families, and communities. We would welcome discussing these priorities with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Hon. Robert Berlin
DuPage County State's Attorney

Hon. Tom Dart
Cook County Sheriff

Hon. Mike Nerheim
Lake County State's Attorney

Hon. Brian Asbell
Peoria County Sheriff

Hon. Gerald Bustos
Rock Island County Sheriff

Hon. Tyler Edmonds
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Buffalo Grove Police Dept.

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Bartonville Police Department

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Western Illinois University Public Safety Department

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