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Northeast PA Law Enforcement / PA Corrections Secretary Wetzel: “High-Quality Pre-K is Crime Prevention”

Statewide Report: *\$50 million invested in high-quality Pre-K now would yield \$150 million in crime and other cost savings; Corrections survey links difficulty reading to later juvenile crime*

Dallas, PA (April 18, 2019) – Corrections Secretary John Wetzel and Northeast PA law enforcement leaders released a new report today from the anti-crime organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids at State Correctional Institution Dallas. The report, “[Law Enforcement Agrees: High-Quality Pre-K is Crime Prevention](#),” shows how an increased \$50 million in state investment for expanding high-quality pre-kindergarten programs, as included in Governor Tom Wolf’s 2019-20 budget proposal, would reduce behavior problems, boost school success and high school graduation rates, reduce crime in Pennsylvania and lead to nearly \$150 million in criminal justice and other cost savings over the lifetimes of participating at-risk children.

Joining Secretary Wetzel were Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis; Hanover Township Police Chief Albert Walker, who also serves as First VP of the PA Chiefs of Police Association; Wilkes-Barre Police Chief Joseph Coffay; Scranton Police Chief Carl Graziano; Jackson Township Police Chief James Balavage; Wright Township Police Chief Royce Engler; and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Pennsylvania State Director Bruce Clash. Local state lawmakers were also present at the report launch.

Together, the law enforcement leaders and Secretary Wetzel urged state lawmakers to include a \$50 million expansion for high-quality pre-kindergarten programs (\$40 million for Pre-K Counts and \$10 million for Head Start Supplemental Assistance Program) as part of the 2019-20 state budget to provide 5,500 additional slots for eligible children. Currently, more than 97,000 eligible three- and four-year-olds in Pennsylvania lack access to high-quality, publicly funded pre-k every year. Locally, 2,939 eligible children in Luzerne County and 1,361 children in Lackawanna County are unserved. For unmet need by state counties and legislative districts, please visit www.prekforpa.org (under “Pre-K Works” then “Maps & Data”).

“Ensuring public safety will rightfully always involve putting some lawbreakers behind bars. But being smart on crime also involves being proactive and investing in proven strategies that help put young people on the right

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path filled with opportunity and out of prisons like this—saving taxpayer money in the long run. High-quality pre-k is one of those strategies,” said Luzerne County District Attorney Stefanie Salavantis.

The new report from Fight Crime: Invest In Kids shows that by the time at-risk children get to kindergarten, many are already behind in vocabulary development and pre-literacy and pre-math skills. They can also have problems with behavior and impulse control. The report cites state and national research studies showing that quality early learning programs have been proven to reduce these disadvantages resulting in fewer behavior problems, better school outcomes, increased high school graduations rates, and, ultimately, less criminal activity.

“Public safety is the top priority for me and my law enforcement colleagues across the state. But we know from years of experience that we must be proactive and implement strategies to keep people from turning to crime in the first place. Education must be the focal point of that strategy, and that process starts early,” said Hanover Township Police Chief Albert Walker. “I currently serve as the First Vice President of the PA Chiefs of Police Association, which is proud of our 20-year partnership with Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, working together to support greater access to high quality pre-kindergarten in order to help break the generational cycle of crime,” he also commented.

The report also emphasizes that Pennsylvania’s high-quality pre-k programs partner with parents to help them improve their children’s academic and behavioral outcomes through ongoing family engagement.

The nearly \$150 million return on the proposed additional \$50 million pre-k investment is derived from economic analyses showing a \$27,000 “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) for every child served multiplied by the 5,500 additional children served who would be served. This return accrues over the course of their lifetimes from reductions in the cost of future crime and increases in participants’ future wages, as well as decreases in other costs such as special education and being held back in school.

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a national anti-crime organization of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, attorneys general and violence survivors, with 200 members in Pennsylvania and over 5,000 members nationwide. For more information, visit www.strongnation.org/FightCrime.

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is a founding partner of the Pre-K for PA Campaign - an issue campaign supported by individuals and organizations across Pennsylvania who believe that investing in our children is the right choice and an urgent necessity. For more information visit www.prekforpa.org.

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