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Testimony by Augusta Chief of Police Jared Mills in support of LD 258 "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"

Monday, February 13, 2023 1 P.M.
Room 228 State House

Chairs Rotundo, Rafferty, Gattine and Brennan, and distinguished members of the Committees, I am Jared Mills, Chief of Police here in Augusta. I am also Past President of Maine Chiefs of Police Association and a member of the anti-crime group FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, which is made up of 140 Maine law enforcement leaders. It is my honor to be here today to testify in support of PreK expansion in the proposed supplemental budget.

I would like to offer the committees a unique perspective on high-quality early learning – its impact on crime. I have been in law enforcement here in our Capitol City for 25 years and I have seen how the lack of properly supervised activities can lead kids into crime-ridden environments.

Government's most fundamental responsibility is to protect the public safety. There is no substitute for tough law enforcement. But once a crime has been committed, lives have already been shattered. Those of us on the front line in the fight against crime understand that we will never fix the crime problem solely through arrests and imprisonment. We can save lives, hardship – and money – by investing in programs that can keep children from growing up to become criminals in the first place.

Today I'm here to tell you that high-quality early learning programs are also a great crime reduction strategy.

Many in this room know what the research tells us about what a critical time the first five years of life is for a child's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development.

What is equally important, but less well known, is that quality early learning programs can also significantly reduce the chances of a child growing up to become a criminal.

A study of the Chicago Child-Parents Centers shows these facts. These centers provided school readiness programs to 100,000 preschoolers from some of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods over the course of 30 years. At age 18 the study examined outcomes for a

MAINE

subgroup of these children and matched those outcomes with a peer group of similar kids not enrolled in the Centers. The study showed that kids who did not receive quality early learning programs were **70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime by age 18**. By age 24 the now young adults who were in the Child-Parent Centers program as children were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail.

Most recently, an MIT study of the Boston preschool program found that enrollees were less likely to have been incarcerated in a juvenile facility during high school, compared to non-enrollees.

High-quality early learning and child care programs also save money. A well-respected, independent cost-benefit analysis of nearly 20 different studies showed that early learning programs can, on average, return a “profit” (economic benefit minus cost) to society of nearly \$27,000 for every child served, when cost savings from reduced crime are included.

Maine has made solid progress on increasing the option for voluntary Pre-K programming in various regions across our state in recent years, now serving about 50 percent of our 4-year-olds.

We know that across our communities there are schools and community partnerships interested in adding public PreK programs, and that there is a great need to have our youngest learners with IEPs served better by our educational system. The public PreK expansions proposed in the Governor’s budget is a step in the right direction to give more of our youngest students these early learning opportunities.

Attached is Maine Fight Crime: Invest In Kids newest brief: *“We Are The Ones You Pay Later.”*

We are asking you to support the proposed PreK funding in the biennial budget to continue the successes in expanding more voluntary public PreK to additional Maine students. Thank you.