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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"

Tuesday, February 21, 2023 1 p.m. Room 228 State House

Chairs Rotundo, Baldacci, Sachs and Meyer, 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. I am also the Augusta Assistant City Manager and have the honor of helping to oversee all of the Augusta's programs, one of which is a child care program for 5-12 years olds. I am proud of our program, which has been operating for 28 years and serves 100-120 kids daily, some of whom are children of our city workers, as well as other children in our community. It is my honor to testify in support for critical early care and education programs, especially child care, in the biennial state budget.

As I have done several times before this Committee, 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.

High-quality early learning programs are also a great crime reduction strategy. This is backed up by a lot of research, including the 30-year study of the Chicago Child-Parents Centers and a more recent MIT study of the Boston preschool program that I cited in my Feb. 13th testimony to your Committees on public PreK.

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Now, I would like to add how important it is that we support the child care workforce, which is the workforce behind the workforce in Maine. Like many across the state, Augusta's child care stayed open all through the pandemic, even when schools closed, serving families of first responders, medical professionals and many other who would not have been able to go to work without reliable child care for their children. I can attest to the fact that the child care providers are some of our hardest workers, and many make just slightly above minimum wage.

For the reasons I am pleased to testify in support of continued, and increased, funding, for the critically important early learning and care programs that are found in many places in the Health and Human Services budget, specifically in Child Care Services including the wage supplement for child care providers, Early Childhood Consultation Program, Head Start, Child Mental Health Services, and the Maine Children's Trust. I know there will be a bill before both your Committees later this session that seeks to add more supports for the child care workforce and I encourage members of both Committees to give that proposal your strong support as well, and increase funding for child care in the biennial state budget.

I am also attaching to my testimony a letter sent to all legislators in January from 70 law enforcement leaders seeking your support of quality early care and education programs. Thank you for your consideration.