



MAINE

**TESTIMONY BY JOEL MERRY, SAGADAHOC COUNTY SHERIFF  
AND MEMBER, FIGHT CRIME. INVEST IN KIDS**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES  
ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**IN SUPPORT OF LD 1726  
“AN ACT TO BUILD MAINE’S ECONOMY BY SUPPORTING CHILD CARE FOR WORKING  
FAMILIES”  
MAY 10, 2023, 10 A M**

Chairs Baldacci and Myer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Joel Merry, Sheriff in Sagadahoc County and a 15-year member of Fight Crime Invest in Kids, a national anti-crime organization made up of more than 5,000 law enforcement leaders – chiefs, sheriffs and prosecutors, from every state in our great nation, 140 of whom are here in Maine. As members we focus on research-proven programs that help children get the right start in life, stay on track, and avoid contact with crime. We help the public, community leaders and policymakers, like all of you, find the wisdom in investing in quality programming for our youngest children.

In addition to being Sagadahoc County’s current Sheriff, I am a former President of the Maine Sheriffs Association. I am also a father, a grandfather, and an active community member. In fact, I spend a fair amount of time at the Bath YMCA, which has our area’s largest child care program. In the past I have testified before several Committees about all of these experiences. I am pleased to do so again today and testify before you in support of LD 1726.

I do not profess to be an expert on child care, however I can tell you as someone who has worked with many child care providers, that they are amazing individuals. They are the key to parents being able to go to work and be fully attentive to their jobs. Because parents know their kids are safe and well cared for.

I offer this Committee a unique perspective on high-quality early learning – its impact on crime. I have been in law enforcement for my entire 40+- year career. And I have seen how the lack of properly supervised activities can lead kids down the wrong path.

Today I want to share that high-quality early learning programs are also a great crime reduction strategy.

Some in this room know what the research tells us about what a critical time the first five years of life are for a child’s physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development. The early educators with us this morning are experts on these topics.

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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 be involved in crime

Research clearly shows that high-quality early care and education for at-risk kids not only reduces their likelihood of committing a crime later in life, but also provides far greater savings than costs. 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 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 Center program as children were 20 percent less likely to have served time in jail.

In addition, these programs also save money. A well-respected independent cost-benefit analysis of nearly 20 different studies showed that high-quality early learning programs can, on average, return a "profit" (economic benefits minus cost) to society of nearly \$22,000 for every child served.

Young children experience a period of critical brain development during their earliest years. Research shows that the experiences children have in those years set the foundation for future development and success.

We know that the best way to keep children on a path away from crime as they grow is to reach them as early as possible.

For all of these reasons, I encourage this Committee to unanimously support LD 1726.