

**TESTIMONY BY BATH CHIEF OF POLICE MICHAEL FIELD BEFORE  
THE EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 1321 "AN ACT TO PROMOTE THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL  
LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD"**

**1:00 p.m. Monday April 24, 2017  
Room 202 Cross State Office Building**

Senator Langley, Representative Kornfield, Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Mike Field, Chief of Police in Bath. I am also a member of the anti-crime organization Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and a Board member and former Campaign Chair of the United Way Mid Coast Maine. I am pleased to offer my support of LD 1321 "An Act To Promote The Social and Emotional Learning and Development in Early Childhood."

I do not profess to be an expert on education – that's your field. Mine is law enforcement. Today I would like to share with you statistics and research, some of which you have heard before, that link our two fields.

Numerous studies of high-quality early learning programs have shown that students who participate in high-quality early care and education programs have better academic achievement, cognitive development, and grade retention. Studies have also found that quality early learning programs can contribute to positive social-emotional development, such as better self-control and fewer behavior problems.

These early social-emotional skills are critical for later success, including avoiding involvement with the criminal justice system. In 2013 *The American Journal of Public Health* published the results of a 20-year study showing a link between children's social skills in kindergarten and their well-being in early adulthood.

For every one-point decrease in a child's social competence score in kindergarten, he/she had:

- 64% higher chance of having spent time in juvenile detention;
- 67% higher chance of having been arrested by early adulthood;
- 52% higher rate of recent binge drinking and 82% higher rate of marijuana usage;
- and
- 82% higher chance of being in or on a waiting list for public housing.

Quality early learning programs can help build these important social-emotional skills and also significantly reduce the chances of a child growing up to become a criminal.

A long-term study in Chicago shows that kids who did not receive the Child-Parent Centers' quality early learning programs were **70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime by the time they reached adulthood**. By age 20 the Child-Parent Center participants reported a 29 percent increase in high school graduation. Their peers left out of the programs were more likely to be held back in school, more likely to drop out, and less likely to graduate and more likely to commit crimes.



## MAINE

The researchers estimated that the Child-Parent Center program prevented 33,000 crimes – including 13,000 violent crimes – by the time all 100,000 participants reach age 18.

So we know that high-quality early learning programs are great for all kids and also a great crime reduction strategy.

One of the benchmarks of a high-quality early learning program is teacher education and training – which is what this bill addresses. As I read this proposal, I see that it seeks to create a voluntary pilot project at the Maine Department of Education to establish an early childhood consultation program to provide support and guidance to early care and education teachers, in both public preschools and child care centers. These consultants will aid teachers by sharing evidence-based strategies that work to reduce challenging behaviors and promote the social-emotional growth of our youngest children. The consultant would also be available to work with parents of these children.

As a Chief, I can tell you that we see the results of actions taken by too many teenagers and adults who have undiagnosed and untreated behavioral and mental health challenges. Sadly, Maine sheriffs often say that they run Maine's largest mental health facilities.

So it only makes common sense that Maine invest a small amount of resources to begin to address children's challenging behaviors as early as possible. If left unaddressed, Dr. Walter Gilliam's study shows that too many Maine kids are either kicked out or asked to leave their early learning programs. Those of you who saw Dr. Gilliam's presentation to the Maine Children's Caucus about a month ago may recall that Maine's rate of expelling children from early learning programs is the second highest in the country. And is 12 times higher than the expulsion rates in our K-12 system.

Expelling a child doesn't address or help correct the problems – it just shifts it to another setting.

If left unaddressed, a young child's challenging behaviors may well blossom into more challenging and risk-taking behaviors as that child gets older. And at some point, if the behaviors continue to escalate, that child may well grow into a teen or young adult who finds him or herself in the custody of law enforcement. That puts another drain on them and their families, and our communities and our state.

Dr. Gilliam's initial study of a similar early education consultancy program in Connecticut tells us that children in classes receiving this support showed significant decreases in behavior problems, and that positive behaviors were greatest in the areas of decreased oppositional behaviors and hyperactivity. ([http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/ECCP%20Impact%20Brief%202007\\_251667\\_123099\\_5379.pdf](http://ziglercenter.yale.edu/publications/ECCP%20Impact%20Brief%202007_251667_123099_5379.pdf))



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To law enforcement, this pilot program is worthy of your support and the state's investment. I urge the Committee to support LD 1321.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my comments. I am happy to answer any questions.