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Illinois Law Enforcement Leaders: Preschool Funding Cuts Shortchange Our Fiscal Future by Hundreds of Millions of Dollars

Local sheriffs, police chiefs and state's attorneys say erosion of state preschool in southern Illinois will have public safety risks

SPRINGFIELD (April 26, 2012) -- Law enforcement leaders from across Illinois urged state lawmakers to reject any further cuts of Illinois' state preschool program in a conference call and a live news conference in the Capitol building in Springfield on Thursday.

The steady erosion of funding for Illinois' Preschool for All initiative over the past three years has cut 17,600 kids from preschool education, including over 1500 slots in the southern Illinois region. The law enforcement leaders released a new research brief that detailed these cuts county-by-county and found that cutting the state preschool program costs the state far more than it saves, especially in crime costs.

"With tens of thousands of children cut out of preschool in such a short time, we sit at a crossroads as a state. We need to stop and think about the consequences of continuing to dismantle a research-proven strategy that makes our state safer and stronger," Union County State's Attorney Tyler Edmonds said.

On the conference call for members of the media, Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart and DuPage County State's Attorney Robert Berlin, Algonquin Police Chief Russ Laine, Rock Island Police Chief Scott Harris and Granite City Police Chief Rich Miller urged the Illinois General Assembly to support Governor Quinn's proposal to reverse a portion of the funding cuts in the FY 2013 state budget.

Law enforcement leaders also announced support for repairing preschool education in Illinois at a live news conference in Springfield. Participating in the State Capitol news conference were Madison County State's Attorney Thomas Gibbons, Union County State's Attorney Tyler Edmonds, Morgan County Sheriff Randy Duvendack, Channahon Police Chief Joe Pena, Bartonville Police Chief Brian Fengel, and Peoria Heights Police Chief Dustin Sutton.

Other southern Illinois law enforcement leaders agreed.

"Law enforcement knows from experience, research, and just plain common sense that spending less on preschool won't save us a dime. The state of Illinois cannot afford to pay the cost of more young lives eventually ending in violence or jail," Jefferson County Sheriff Roger Mulch said.

Some counties have seen more than half of their state preschool slots eliminated, including Calhoun County, which no longer has any state-funded preschool classrooms. This is the first time in more than a decade that Illinois has not had state funded preschool classrooms in all 102 Illinois counties.

In 29 southern Illinois counties, 22 percent of preschool slots have been lost—over 1500 3- and 4-year-olds. Particularly hard hit was Effingham County, where the state preschool program was virtually eliminated by a 97 percent loss in available slots for children. Also of note is Massac County, which lost 89 percent of preschool slots.

The new research brief released today also suggests that instead of improving the state's fiscal condition, the loss of 17,600 children receiving preschool education will result in lifetime future costs of \$200 million to the state for this group of children. That amount is more than three times greater than the \$55 million the state saved by cutting the program over the past three years. These expenses are incurred because at-risk children denied preschool now are less likely to be successful in school, earn less as adults, contribute less in tax revenue and are more likely to engage in crime.

Since there are new three and four-year-olds every year, this lifetime cost will continue to accumulate for each new group of 17,000 children denied access to preschool.

The law enforcement leaders asserted that preschool is an early opportunity to prevent crime and costly incarceration. A long-term study of the high-quality Perry Preschool in Michigan found that by age 27, at-risk kids who did not attend were five times more likely to grow up to be chronic law-breakers than those enrolled in the program. A study of Chicago's Child-Parent Centers found that the high-risk individuals who had not participated in the program were 24 percent more likely to have been incarcerated by age 24 than the participants.

The state preschool program, known as Preschool for All, has been cut by \$55 million in the Illinois State Board of Education budget over the past three years. The impact has been widespread:

- In just the last two years, 38 counties faced cuts to preschool of 20 percent or greater.
- In that same time period, 54 counties have lost at least two classrooms of preschoolers (40 kids) and 26 counties have cut more than 100 children from preschool.
- Two counties have seen state-funded preschool virtually disappear with a 97 percent cut in Effingham County and an 89 percent cut in Massac County.
- Calhoun County saw a complete elimination of state-funded preschool with a loss of 80 funded slots.
- The Chicago Metropolitan Area (Cook, DuPage, Will, Kane, Lake and McHenry Counties) alone has seen a loss of 7,000 children from state-funded preschool.

The law enforcement leaders are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, a national anti-crime organization of over 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors. There are more than 300 members in Illinois.

For a complete regional and county-by-county breakdown of preschool cuts, and local press releases with statements from law enforcement across the state, please visit <http://www.fightcrime.org/poundfoolish>

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