

Investing in Children & Youth: A “Force Multiplier” in Crime Prevention

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids works to strengthen public safety by raising chiefs' voices in Springfield and beyond

Google the term “force multiplier” and you’ll find multiple definitions, all relating to factors that dramatically increase a group’s resources and effectiveness, supersizing its outcomes and outputs. That’s the role that Fight Crime: Invest in Kids plays in efforts to ensure communities’ well-being, acting on years of studies regarding what works best in helping to curb crime and violence. This organization’s power comes from some of the strongest tools available: the voices of police chiefs, sheriffs, and prosecutors, all helping to amplify the lessons of exhaustive research.

Nationally, over 5,000 law enforcement leaders belong to this bipartisan, nonprofit group. Its Illinois membership of 360 includes 200 police chiefs from communities in every corner of the state, from Rockford to Metropolis. Together, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids members call for greater public investments in proven priorities such as early childhood and afterschool programs — priorities that, in themselves, also play a substantial “multiplier” role in bolstering public safety.

“The research is pretty conclusive: High-quality early care and education can put kids on a path toward success and away from trouble,” said Crystal Lake Police Chief Jim Black, who joined Fight Crime: Invest in Kids’ membership in 2013. “The first three to five years of children’s

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development represent the most effective period for setting them on this course, studies show — a crucial opportunity for making a positive, lasting difference.”

Helping illustrate this is a longitudinal study from right here in Illinois, involving the Chicago Child-Parent Center program. The study followed students from this high-quality preschool program over the course of years, into adulthood, and found that — by age 18 — they were 70% less likely than their peers to have been arrested for a violent crime. By age 24, they were 20% less likely to have served time in jail or prison.

Similarly, strong afterschool programs have been shown to help youth by providing safe and worthwhile alternatives to the streets during the hours sometimes called “prime time for juvenile crime,” reducing the potential for risky behaviors while increasing graduation rates. One study found that afterschool participants are 30% less likely to become involved in criminal activities.

An important point about Fight Crime: Invest in Kids — the organization does not provide any children’s services of its own and does not seek government funding for itself. Instead, its members call for boosting proven services that are administered by local schools and community-based providers, such as childcare centers and afterschool programs. They do this in a number of ways, supported by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids staff. Common activities include:

- **Speaking up in the media** — Law enforcement leaders have contributed opinion pieces and letters to the editors of newspapers. For instance, in April, East Dundee Chief Jim Krueger and Elmhurst Chief Mike McLean wrote to The Chicago Tribune about the crime-prevention significance of proposed increases in state funding for pre-K and childcare.
- **Outreach to policymakers** — Police chiefs, sheriffs, and state’s attorneys have joined meetings with state lawmakers, members of Congress, and the Governor — in Springfield and in communities throughout Illinois, in person and virtually. Example: This past spring, Chiefs Adam Mefford (Jacksonville), Darren Gault (Moline), and Frank Kaminski (Park Ridge) each joined



◀ *Left: Evanston Police Chief Schenita Stewart reads to toddlers at a Fight Crime: Invest in Kids event in September, highlighting the significance of early childhood programs. State Rep. Jennifer Gong-Gershowitz joined the chief at a Morton Grove preschool.*

meetings with their local legislators to discuss early childhood priorities.

- **Releasing new research and reports**
 - Oftentimes, law enforcement officials join news events issuing new Fight Crime: Invest in Kids publications. Last year, for example, Chief Jerel Jones — then at Macomb, now serving in Flossmoor — spoke at a virtual news conference marking the release of a report on meeting rural Illinois' early care and education needs; the event resulted in over three dozen news stories around the state.

“Participation in Fight Crime: Invest in Kids could not be easier,” said Chief Jones. “There’s no cost to membership and no obligations. Plus, Fight Crime staff provide all the support a police chief needs to take part in whatever activities he or she chooses. Most importantly: Together, law enforcement voices make an enormous difference in the lives of children. Our perspectives and credibility help to encourage policy actions that can dramatically improve kids’ chances of doing well in school and in later life.”

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids does none

of this work on its own. It works with a wide variety of partners similarly interested in policies that help strengthen the trajectory of children’s lives. Among them: the ReadyNation network of business executives and the Mission: Readiness group of retired military leaders, respectively making the case for bolstering our economy and national security. These two organizations share nonprofit status with Fight Crime: Invest in Kids under the bipartisan Council for a Strong America umbrella.

The policy results are impressive. Over the 25-year history of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids in Illinois, its members have helped to successfully secure hundreds of millions of dollars in new resources for early care and education. This includes nearly \$300 million in additional dollars this year alone to help — among other things — open 5,000 new preK slots statewide and bolster the compensation of long-underpaid childcare teachers. Also in 2023, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids authored resolutions in the Illinois House and Senate stressing the significance of vital, birth-to-3 services in helping to combat the opioid crisis and encouraging further investments in them.



▲ *Above: Niles Police Chief Luis Tigera makes some new friends at a “cops-n-tots” celebration arranged by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids in September. As part of this northwest-suburban event, local lawmakers joined a group of chiefs in discussing early childhood needs.*

Similarly, for over two decades, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids has joined partners in efforts to protect and extend critical afterschool services to more youth throughout Illinois. In FY24, alone, this has included over \$6 million in new state resources.

Fight Crime: Invest in Kids sincerely thanks its members and the Illinois Association of Chiefs of Police for a long and productive partnership. And if you would like to join these efforts but are not yet a member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, please contact Illinois State Director Sean Noble at:

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