

**FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *ILLINOIS***  
**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ILLINOIS SENATE**  
**COMMITTEE ON DEFICIT REDUCTION**  
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FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *ILLINOIS* is a bipartisan, nonprofit anti-crime organization led by 300 police chiefs, sheriffs, state's attorneys, leaders of police officer organizations, and victims of violence. Our mission is to take a hard-nosed look at the research about what really works to keep kids from becoming criminals and to share that information with the public and policymakers. Among the strategies proven to be effective are quality early care and educational programs for preschoolers, after-school programs and prevention of child abuse, as well as programs that nip delinquency in the bud by getting troubled kids back on track. We are still far from meeting the need in all these areas. Continued failure to do so is a crime prevention disaster. We recognize that the budget situation is deteriorating rapidly and will require some very difficult choices. It is hard to imagine, though, any investments beyond those described below that would so substantially reduce budgetary demands on state and county governments in the years to come and begin to save innocent lives and taxpayer dollars almost immediately. Therefore we believe the following human service programs should not only be protected from cuts, but increased:

**I. The Department of Human Services' Healthy Families and Parents Too Soon line items.**

Without the support of extended families and robust communities, many new and expecting parents feel isolated and unprepared even though they are their children's most important teachers. Low-income parents, particularly, face hurdles just to provide the necessities of life for their children. Research shows that voluntary intensive home visiting that helps parents with parenting skills and accessing services can cut child abuse and neglect significantly. There are a number of model programs that provide voluntary intensive home-visiting and parent education. Lack of funding in Illinois leaves current home-visiting programs only able to reach 1 of 7 kids in poverty ages 0-3. Reaching more at-risk families with these proven programs will cut child abuse and neglect significantly. Cutting these services will almost surely result in a rise in abuse and neglect.

**II. Identify and Help Troubled Kids Early on to Get Back on Track.** Law enforcement is doing a good job addressing juvenile crime and making sure offending juveniles are taken off the streets – almost 45,000 juveniles get arrested every year. The most dangerous of these young people are put behind bars.

The problem – a problem with disastrous consequences for public safety -- is that police officers and sheriffs find themselves continually arresting the same kid again and again. Our state's attorneys are forced to prosecute the same kid again and again. About 3,000 juveniles are committed to a state facility every year and, after they are released, 73% of them are arrested again within two years. Forty-eight per cent of them wind up right behind those same bars within three years.

Maintaining a broken juvenile corrections system is clearly not cost-effective, and it does not effectively serve troubled kids or their communities. These extraordinarily high rates of re-offending indicate that troubled kids with mental health problems are not being properly identified and treated; our secure

corrections facilities are not effectively counter-acting and correcting criminal behavior; and that kids who serve time are not being adequately monitored with proven interventions when they return to their communities.

The good news is that there are many innovative, proven, evidence-based approaches that, if implemented well, will reduce rearrests of juveniles, increase public safety, and save money.

Within the Department of Human Services **the Redeploy Illinois** program funds community based programs that are showing promise at reducing future crime by youth. In FY 09, Redeploy Illinois is only operating in 14 counties in Illinois. The following programs also show promise from a crime prevention perspective: the **Mental Health Juvenile Justice (MHJJ) Initiative** within the Division of Mental Health, Illinois Department of Human Services, and the **Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership**.

**III. Shut down "Prime Time for Juvenile Crime" by assuring families access to youth development programs for the after-school and summer hours.** Research and evaluation across the country show that quality youth development programs can cut crime immediately and transform the Prime Time for Juvenile Crime (3:00 to 6:00 PM) into hours of constructive activities that teach youngsters the values and skills they need to become good neighbors and responsible adults.

Unfortunately, we continue to deny tens of thousands of youth and families in Illinois access to high quality after school programs like Teen REACH in the Illinois Department of Human Services. Current estimates are that after-school programs are only available for one out of every three school-aged children who need them. This leaves as many as 379,000 unsupervised youth in Illinois after the school bell rings every day.

The General Assembly should protect and expand funding for after school activities through **the Teen REACH program**, which makes available quality after-school opportunities for our school-age children.