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United States House of Representatives
Committee on the Budget

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Hearing

Building a Foundation for Families:
Fighting Hunger, Investing in Children

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Testimony by:
Leon Lott

Sheriff,
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On Behalf of
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Budget Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Leon Lott and, for 12 years, I have been the Sheriff of Richland County, South Carolina – the largest Sheriff's Department in South Carolina. I began my law enforcement career as a patrol officer 34 years ago, and have been Police Chief for a very small, rural town in our state. I have also served as the President of the South Carolina Law Enforcement Officers' Association. For ten years, I have been a member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a national, bi-partisan, anti-crime organization of 4,500 sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors and victims of violence around the nation, dedicated to reducing crime through proven-effective investments that give kids the right start in life.

My colleagues and I in law enforcement know that dangerous criminals must be put away where they can do no harm. I have locked up more than my share over the years, particularly – in recent years – for gang and drug offenses. But I have also seen that handcuffs and bars, alone, will not reduce our communities' crime problems. Putting a gang member into a prison cell will not bring a teenager he murdered back into his mother's arms.

What we know from our experience, the research backs up: targeted investments in our children can give them a better start in life – so that they don't turn to gangs, drugs, and crime.

Mr. Chairman, the members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids appreciate the difficult job facing Congress and, in particular, this Budget Committee in determining how best to allocate scarce resources in a time of enormous financial challenges facing this country. My message today is a simple one: Take the long view. Recognize that a dollar spent today on effective and proven programs serving at-risk children and their families will save many times the programs' cost in the longer term. Our nation must not shortchange the very programs that have been proven to work. Our families and communities need these programs now more than ever, and our future safety depends on them.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

The early years of life are crucial to a child's brain development. The National Research Council has found that 90 percent of brain development occurs before the age of five. High-quality early care and education for at-risk kids during those critical early years not only can help close the achievement gap; it can also reduce the risk of later crime. In fact, at-risk kids in Chicago left out of the government-funded Child-Parent Center programs were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18, according to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The study of Chicago's Child Parent Centers, which served 100,000 three- and four year-olds, also found that those left out were 67 percent more likely to be held back a grade in school, and 71 percent more likely to have been placed in special education. In another study, at-risk kids who were left out of high quality High/Scope Perry Preschool program were five times more likely to be chronic offenders with five or more arrests by age 27. By age 40, those who did not attend the Perry Preschool program were more than twice as likely to become career offenders with more than 10 arrests, and twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes. Further, children left out of the program were four times more likely to be arrested for drug felonies by age 40, and seven times more likely to be arrested for possession of dangerous drugs. Children who did participate in the Perry Preschool program were 31 percent more likely to graduate from high school.

Head Start is the federally-funded national pre-kindergarten program for low-income families that provides early education services for children ages 3 to 5, at a cost of about \$8,000 per child. Research on the **short-term** impacts of Head Start has often demonstrated only modest effects. However, given the disadvantages that many poor children face, even these modest improvements are meaningful. For example, a national randomized control

trial of Head Start showed that Head Start cut the achievement gap nearly in half for pre-reading skills between Head Start children and the national average for all 3- and 4-year-olds. So Head Start helped low-income children make real strides in catching up academically to their more advantaged peers.

Even more significant than short-term academic progress, Head Start has had **meaningful impacts on children's lives in the long term**. Several studies have demonstrated Head Start's long-lasting effects. These have included increased high school graduation rates, reduced crime, decreased grade retention and decreased special education placements. For example, one national study found that Head Start increased high school graduation rates by 7 percent for children in the program compared to their siblings not in the program but in other care, and decreased crime by 8.5 percent.

Head Start is already an effective program, and incorporates most of the key features of high-quality early education programs proven to cut crime, such as appropriate class-size and teacher-student ratios, comprehensive and age-appropriate early learning standards, related services (including health referrals), and parent involvement and coaching. Further, under the recent Head Start reauthorization bill (enacted a year ago, but not yet fully funded), a portion of all increased investments in the program will be dedicated to **quality improvements which would make the program even stronger**, such as increased teacher qualifications so that more teachers have at least Bachelor's Degrees, and enhanced curriculum standards. Currently, Head Start teachers are earning half of what public school teachers earn, so it's hard to attract and retain more highly-qualified teachers; increased quality improvement funding, once it's appropriated, will really help.

Early Head Start was created in 1994, in response to research indicating the developmental importance of the first three years in a child's life. Early Head Start serves both pregnant women and children ages birth to 3, providing guidance, information, parenting support, and direct services. Early Head Start provides services through center-based, home-based, and combination program options.

As with Head Start, the research shows that Early Head Start is effective. The program was evaluated through a randomized study of over 3,000 families participating in 17 Early Head Start programs across the country. Three-year-olds who had participated in Early Head Start, compared to their peers who did not, had higher levels of cognitive and language development, better attention to play, and lower levels of aggressive behavior. Parents who participated in the program, compared with the control group, demonstrated more emotional supportiveness to their children, provided higher levels of language and learning stimulation, and read to their children more. The programs that showed the strongest positive effects were those that implemented all of the federal program performance standards early and those that combined home visiting and center-based services.

While Early Head Start has not been in existence long enough to track long-term outcomes, the implications are clear. The finding that participation in Early Head Start results in lower levels of aggressive behavior is especially significant; sixty percent of children with high levels of disruptive, aggressive behaviors in early childhood will manifest high levels of antisocial and delinquent behavior later in life.

North Carolina's Smart Start is a nationally-recognized initiative designed to both help working parents pay for early child care and improve the quality of care by providing educational opportunities, resources, and educational materials for teachers. Low-income children who were not enrolled in early childhood education centers with North Carolina's Smart Start quality improvement assistance were twice as likely to have behavior problems such as aggressive acts and poor temper control, anxiety, and hyperactivity in kindergarten.

Based on all this evidence of the impact of quality early childhood care and education for at-risk kids, I'm convinced that if we are willing to invest now, our communities will save money. But don't just listen to me.

An analysis by Arthur Rolnick of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis showed that the High/Scope Perry Preschool program provided an annual return on investment of 16 percent, after adjusting for inflation. That's a lot better than anyone's 401k performed last year. The high quality preschool program saved \$16 for every dollar spent (including more than \$11 in crime savings). If you invest \$1,000 in a program such as Perry Preschool, you get a return in benefits of about \$19,000 back in 20 years. These programs work.

Regrettably, state and federal investments lag far behind the need. Only about half of eligible poor kids in this country are served by Head Start. Fewer than five in 100 of eligible infants and toddlers are in Early Head Start. And we don't do much better with the Child Care and Development Block Grant program, helping only seven out of 100 kids in eligible low income families. I don't have to tell you that funding has been stagnant over the past several years – last year, 150,000 fewer kids received child care assistance than in 2000. The economic recession has further compounded the problem—more kids are eligible for these programs and in need of these services, but unable to access them, and states are cutting back their early care and education investments, due to their budget shortfalls.

While we, as a nation, have just begun to recognize the crucial value of early care and education in generating long-term returns on investment, we seldom view early care and education as a strategy for short-term economic growth. However, in the short term, investing in the early-education sector will support jobs for thousands of low-income women and men, many of whom have their own children to support. There are over 2 million Americans working in the early education workforce. Early childhood care and education are strong job-creation vehicles with a demonstrated economic multiplier effect in the short term. In fact, for every two new jobs created in the childcare sector, an additional job is created in the rest of the economy. In addition, early care and education spending goes primarily toward wages. For example, at least 75% of Head Start funding is spent on staff compensation. Because the workforce is entirely within the U.S., and predominantly low-wage, those salaries will quickly be spent in the workers' local economies.

In addition, investing in early care and education also helps financially struggling young families who would either have to pay budget-busting amounts of tuition for childcare, quit their jobs, or leave their children in dangerous circumstances. People who lose their jobs often end child care arrangements, and need help to pay for child care lest they be stuck in a vicious cycle, unable to look for or accept a job because they don't have the money they need to pay for child care. With 60% of women and 90% of men with children under age 6 employed and an annual cost of \$16,000 a year for full-time care for two young children, struggling families can't afford this on their own.

The House-passed version of H.R. 1, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, includes an investment of \$2.1 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start, as well as \$2 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which will create 60,000 jobs, allow over 110,000 more children to participate in Head Start, and provide child care assistance for 300,000 children. In the face of increasing unemployment and poverty rates, declining incomes, and the country experiencing an economic recession—and in light of the many short-term and long-term economic benefits, in addition to crime reduction benefits—we can't afford not to invest more now in federal Head Start and child care programs.

Therefore, on behalf of thousands of law enforcement leaders around the nation, I urge Congress to move to final passage that Head Start, Early Head Start and Child Care and Development Block Grant funding in the House-passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. I also urge this Committee to ensure that the fiscal year 2010 Budget Resolution expressly provides room for the increased investment of \$10 billion for quality early care and education to which President Obama has made a strong commitment.

If we invest now in these programs that work, my deputies and their successors will face fewer violent 18-year-olds and 27-year-old hardened criminals.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT PREVENTION THROUGH HOME VISITING

Each year, an estimated 2.7 million children in America are abused or neglected, including 900,000 cases that were reported and able to be confirmed by overburdened state child protection systems. More than 1,400 children die from abuse or neglect each year, and over half of them were previously unknown to Child Protective Services. Children who survive abuse or neglect carry the emotional scars for life. The best available research indicates that, based on the confirmed cases of abuse and neglect in just one year, an additional 35,000 children will become violent criminals and 250 will become murderers as adults as a direct result of the abuse and neglect they endured. In other words, if we could somehow stop every instance of child abuse and neglect for one year, there would be 35,000 fewer violent criminals and 250 fewer murderers on our streets in later years.

Fortunately, evidence-based, voluntary, home visiting programs can prevent child abuse and neglect and reduce later crime and violence. These programs help new parents learn skills to promote healthy child development and be better parents. For example, one program, the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), randomly assigned interested at-risk pregnant women to receive visits by nurses starting before the birth of a first child and continuing until the child was age two. Rigorous research, originally published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, shows the program cut abuse and neglect among at-risk kids in half. In addition, children of mothers who received the coaching had 60% fewer arrests by age 15 than the children of mothers who were not coached. The mothers' arrests were cut by 60%, as well. The research is clear – these programs work.

Prevent Child Abuse America estimates that child abuse and neglect cost Americans \$94 billion a year. Researchers with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis concluded that NFP produced an average of \$5 in savings for every \$1 invested, and produced more than \$28,000 in net savings for every high-risk family enrolled in the program.

Every year, over 600,000 low-income women in the U.S. become mothers for the first time. This means that, in the United States, there are 1.5 million low-income women who are pregnant or have a child under the age of two. These are the women who are eligible for NFP at any given time. Yet, the program is only able to serve about 20,000 mothers annually, due to a lack of sufficient funding.

Unlike in the early care and education area – for which Congress has created Head Start, Early Head Start, and Child Care funding streams – there is NO authorized federal funding stream dedicated to addressing the need for quality, voluntary home visitation around the nation. President Obama has pledged to fully meet this unmet need; we urge Congress to take immediate steps to address the substantial unmet need in this area, through the enactment, this year, of two complementary bills:

- the bi-partisan Education Begins At Home Act -- to expand and improve evidence-based home visiting through federal funding for competitive grants from states to local programs; and
- the bi-partisan Healthy Children and Families Act – to provide high-quality nurse home visitation as a reimbursable health-related service option through Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program.

If we help strengthen at-risk families, and help parents to do the tough job of parenting a little better, that will make a world of difference in keeping little kids safe from harm in their own homes, and keeping all of us safe when those little kids grow up.

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR THE “PRIME TIME FOR JUVENILE CRIME”

I learned, as an officer on the streets, that the hours after school can be the riskiest for our young people. In the hour after the school bell rings, violent juvenile crime soars and the prime time for juvenile crime begins. The peak hours for such crime are from 3:00 to 6:00 PM on school days. These are also the hours when children are most likely to become victims of crime, be in an automobile accident, smoke, drink alcohol, or use drugs.

Fortunately, after-school programs that connect children to caring adults and provide constructive activities during these critical hours are among our tools for preventing crime. For example, a study compared five housing projects without Boys & Girls Clubs to five receiving new clubs. At the beginning, drug activity and vandalism were the same. But by the time the study ended, the projects without the programs had 50 percent more vandalism and scored 37 percent worse on drug activity.

More than 14 million children still lack adult supervision after school. President Obama has pledged to double funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) program – the federal government’s principal after-school program investment. We urge Congress and this Committee to ensure that is a priority in the 2010 budget.

CONCLUSION

One element of all of the evidence-based, proven-effective crime-fighting approaches is crucial: HIGH QUALITY. You can only generate strong results through strong programs. As a long-time member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, I know that we do everything we can to support investments in programs that can reduce crime – and we do everything we can to make the programs of the highest quality, so they can get those crime-reduction results. And we’re always up for new allies to work with on Capitol Hill to make that happen.

So: the needs are clear. The results of high quality programs are clear. Let’s work together to keep strengthening the quality of federal programs AND meeting more of the needs. Every day, we’re paying the far greater costs of our failure to have met these needs years ago; I see those failures in the criminal cases my office deals with, day after day, year after year.

And I saw some of those failures last Friday, when I was a “Master of Ceremonies” for a beauty pageant at the state’s lockup for juvenile girls, ages 15-17. The seven girls in the pageant were in for charges ranging from armed robbery to drug offenses, and some were white and some were black. But some things almost all of them shared: a history of child abuse; a single-parent family; and a history of truancy. None of the girls had been in preschool. And here’s the pageant winner: she’s one of seven children of her mother (by multiple fathers); and her father, who has had children with multiple mothers, is now in jail.

Kids don’t choose their parents. But we, as a nation, can choose to invest in what works to give those kids a chance in life. Otherwise, they’ll pay, and we’ll all pay.

My more than three decades of experience in law enforcement tell me – and my 4,500 colleagues nationwide concur – that we can’t afford NOT to make these crime-fighting investments in kids NOW.

Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.