FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS
COUNCIL FOR A STRONG AMERICA

February 22, 2024

Dear Members of the Missouri State Legislature,

We are members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a bipartisan, national, nonprofit organization of 5,000 law enforcement leaders—including 120 here in Missouri—who believe that the best way to stop crime is to invest in evidence-based programs that prevent it.

We are very thankful for the investments you made last year in early childhood care and education programs. Your investments protected the system from collapse and helped many kids, working families, and providers.

Unfortunately, child care is still out of reach for too many families, and early childhood educators are still quitting in droves, further expanding child care deserts. **We urge you to build on this opportune moment and prioritize early childhood funding in the budget this year.**

Chiefly, we hope to see:

- **Child care subsidies** raised to the 100th percentile for infants and toddlers, in accordance with Governor Parson's proposed budget – and to the federally-recommended 75th percentile of market rate for preschool-aged children
- **Child care tax credits** passed that are designed to help more kids and families afford child care, and to keep more providers' doors open
- **Appropriation** to match local investments in early childhood education
- **Expanded pre-K supports and slots** for children in low- to middle-income families and additional pre-K provider grants

We know from our own experiences in law enforcement and from decades of research that high-quality child care and early learning don't just prepare kids to succeed in school and life; they also protect public safety. Kids who are given the opportunity in their earliest years to develop and learn in age-appropriate ways are less likely to become involved in the criminal justice system as young adults.

Numerous longitudinal studies support this link between high-quality early education and crime reduction. For example, one study found that children not served by the Chicago Child Parent Centers early education program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18.

High-quality early education helps kids meet school readiness benchmarks at kindergarten entry, reducing the likelihood that they underperform in elementary school, increasing the likelihood they graduate from high school on time, and improving later behavioral outcomes.

But Missouri parents struggle to access and afford any child care – much less high-quality care – with more than half of Missouri residents (54 percent) living in a child care desert. And early childhood professionals often receive poverty wages - inhibiting their ability to provide children with the enriching care and learning they need.

Thank you for your commitment to our state's kids and families, especially those who are most vulnerable. There is no better time than this budget cycle to invest in our next generation.

Sincerely,

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John Davis
Chief of Police
Ash Grove Police Department

Chris McPhail
Chief of Police
Battlefield Police Department

/s/ Eric Schmitt
Eric Schmitt
Chief of Police
Branson Police Department

Mark McCall
Chief of Police
Carl Junction Police Department

Bob Holder
Sheriff
Dunklin County Sheriff's Office

Todd Lemoine
Chief of Police
Kimberling City Police Department

Dustin Dunklee
Prosecuting Attorney
Morgan County Prosecutors Office

Kevin Chrisman
Chief of Police
Parkville Police Department

Dennis Martin
Sheriff
Atchison County Sheriff's Office

Robert Muenz
Chief of Police
Blue Springs Police Department

Bill Puett
Sheriff
Buchanan County Sheriff's Office

Jeffrey Lofton
Chief of Police
Clever Police Department

Leonard Sanders
Chief of Police
Fordland Police Department

Mike Nienhuis
Chief of Police
Laurie Police Department

John Panning
Chief of Police
Mound City Police Department

Mark Owen
Sheriff
Platte County Sheriff's Office

Jacob Shellabarger
Prosecuting Attorney
Audrain County Prosecutors Office

Mark Webb
Chief of Police
Bolivar Police Department

/s/ Ruth Ann Dickerson
Ruth Ann Dickerson
Sheriff
Cape Girardeau County Sheriff's Office

Larry Fish
Sheriff
Clinton County Sheriff's Office

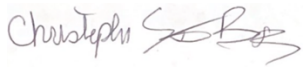
Brian Parker
Prosecuting Attorney
Iron County Prosecutors Office

Kristin Nenninger
Chief of Police
Marble Hill Police Department

Joe Campbell
Chief of Police
Nixa Police Department

James Eaton
Chief of Police
Reeds Spring Police Department

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Scott Bagley
Chief of Police
Richmond Police Department

/s/ Jody Intravia
Jody Intravia
Chief of Police
Rockaway Beach Police Department



Sean Fagan
Chief of Police
Rolla Police Department



Joe Wuebker
Sheriff
Schuyler County Sheriff's Office



James McMillen
Chief of Police
Sikeston Department of Public Safety



Trampus Taylor
Chief of Police
Sparta Police Department



Paul Williams
Chief of Police
Springfield Police Department



Vernon Betts
Sheriff
St. Louis City Sheriff's Department



Chad Hartman
Chief of Police
Versailles Police Department



Mike Lucas
Chief of Police
Village of Indian Point Police Department



Kelly Clark
Chief of Police
Weston Police Department



Clint Danforth
Chief of Police
Wheaton Police Department



Dominic Orlando
Chief of Police
Woodson Terrace Police Department