



*Nearly 5,000 Attorneys General, Police Chiefs,
Sheriffs, Prosecutors, other Law Enforcement
Leaders, and Violence Survivors Preventing Crime
and Violence*

Education Committee of the New Jersey Legislature

Pre-K Hearing

Hearing on
Monday, September 21, 2015

Delivered by
Chief of Police James Abbott
West Orange, NJ

On behalf of:
Fight Crime: Invest in Kids

Good morning, and thank you for allowing me a few minutes to speak. My name is James Abbott, and I am the Chief of Police in West Orange. I am also a member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a non-profit, non-partisan anti-crime organization of nearly 5,000 sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors and crime survivors nationwide – including 44 members here in New Jersey. Our mission is to take a hard-nosed look at research on what it takes to keep kids out of crime and then educate the public and policymakers on that research.

As a Police Chief it is my job to do everything possible to protect the public. Arresting individuals who commit crimes is one way I do that. But I know from my personal experiences that we can't simply arrest, prosecute and incarcerate our way out of our crime problems. We have to implement strategies that keep people from turning to crime in the first place.

Education needs to be the focal point of that strategy, so I commend you for focusing on access to quality education throughout the state. On a personal level, my wife and I really value quality education. My wife is a teacher, and we made sure we to send our children to preschool. I feel fortunate though that we were to pay for preschool on our own. I know that not every family can afford to pay for preschool, and I have seen what can happen when a child does not have access to quality programming early in life. Often times, when we arrest an 18 year old, he already seems like a hardened criminal. It seems too late. We need to intervene early to keep kids on the right track.

Nationwide, seven out of 10 inmates in state prisons don't have a high school diploma. As I think about the individuals we arrest on the street, I can see the pattern of events that led to their arrest. Many struggled in school. Some who cannot read or write, end up getting frustrated and dropping out. While we arrest well-educated people, there is an undeniable link between dropping out and future crime.

We know from research that investments in high quality early care and education programs put kids on a different course and provide them with a foundation for success right away. I am happy to say that we **do** have good things happening the state. The Legislature has invested in high quality preschool and we are starting to see the results.

The research that shows the long-term successful outcomes includes programs like Chicago Child-Parent Centers and Perry Preschool, where children who were given access to early programming were significantly better off than children who were not given access. Children not served by the Perry Preschool program were five times more likely to be chronic lawbreakers by age 27 than those served.

The children given access to Chicago Child-Parent Centers were 20 percent less likely to be arrested for a felony or be incarcerated as young adults compared to those who did not participate. Children not served by the program were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18 compared to those who were in the program.

We are starting to see similar results to Chicago's program here in New Jersey. Not only are the children served 31 percent less likely to be placed in special education than the control group and 40 percent less likely to be held back in school, they were also far ahead in math and reading than those who did not participate. The researchers noted that those results are on par with the results from the Chicago Child-Parent Centers so we are expecting large reductions in crime as these children become adults.

And, a well-respected, independent cost-benefit analysis of more than 20 different preschool studies showed that preschool can return, on average, a “profit” (economic benefits minus costs) to society of more than \$26,000 for every child served.

Early interventions for our at-risk children, wherever they live, are part of the solution in fighting crime and all children benefit from getting the right start in life. In order to prevent more crime, we should provide access to high-quality preschool to more children across New Jersey.

Thank you for all that you do, and please continue to prioritize early education.