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Preventing Crime and Violence*

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Sheriff Behr: Early Childhood Programs cut crime, save taxpayer dollars

NORRISTOWN, PA (October 30, 2013)—Noting that Pennsylvania taxpayers are spending almost \$2 billion a year on the state Department of Corrections, Montgomery County Sheriff Eileen Whalon Behr today urged lawmakers to continue to grow high-quality early education programs as a critical strategy to reduce crime, lower prison costs and save taxpayers' money. The Sheriff praised State Representative Mike Vereb, who was in attendance, and Governor Tom Corbett for increasing Pennsylvania's investments in quality early care and education in the current year's state budget.

The Sheriff urged state lawmakers to further expand funding for high-quality early childhood education to reduce the unmet need in southeast Pennsylvania and across the Commonwealth. Currently in Montgomery County, only 41 percent of three- and four-year-olds are served by a publicly-funded early childhood education program and providers of PA Pre-K Counts and state funded Head Start report a waiting list of 60 children for this school year. Across Pennsylvania, only 17 percent of all three- and four-year-olds have access to publicly-funded pre-k.

State Representative Mike Vereb joined the Sheriff during a visit to a state funded Pre-K Counts classroom at Calvary Baptist Children's Learning Center in Norristown to discuss the value of early childhood education and to read to the children. The statewide anti-crime organization FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is sponsoring the event as part of a law enforcement campaign to promote high-quality early childhood education.

Sheriff Behr said, "Investing in high-quality early care and education helps at-risk children in Pennsylvania succeed, boosts their likelihood of graduating from high school, significantly reduces the chances that they will commit crimes, and saves taxpayer dollars from reduced criminal justice system and other costs."

Pennsylvania is spending just over \$1.9 billion in the current state budget fiscal year to house more than 51,000 prisoners—more than \$35,000 an inmate a year. Pennsylvania Department of Corrections spending has increased by more than 1,900 percent from 1980 (\$94 million) to 2013-2014 (\$1.94 billion).

A long-term study of Michigan's Perry Preschool found that at-risk children who did not participate in the high-quality program were five times more likely to be chronic offenders by age 27 than children who did attend. Because of their increased involvement in crime, the children who did not attend were 86 percent more likely to be sentenced to jail or prison by the age of 40. The Perry Preschool Program cut crime, welfare and other costs so much that it saved taxpayers an average of \$180,000 for every child served, with the vast majority of the public savings coming from reduced crime costs alone.

Chicago's Child-Parent Centers have served more than 100,000 3- and 4-year-olds since 1967. The center-based early intervention program provides educational and family services to economically disadvantaged children. A study comparing 989 children in the Child-Parent Centers to 550 similar children who were not in the program showed that children who did not participate were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age 18. Furthermore, by age 26, individuals who did not participate in the program were 27 percent more likely to have spent time in jail or prison.

Pennsylvania's investments in early education like Pre-K Counts, state supplemental funding for Head Start and educational childcare are also yielding impressive results. For example, third-graders who had participated in the high-quality Harrisburg Preschool Program (HPP), the City's publicly funded pre-k program, scored significantly higher on Pennsylvania System of School Assessment tests than did a matched group of students who did not take part in HPP (51 percent vs. 29 percent advanced/proficient in math, 45 percent vs. 23 percent advanced/proficient in reading).

Additionally, the Pre-K Counts program has been shown to reduce disruptive problem behaviors in early childhood that often can progress to high levels of anti-social and delinquent behavior and even violent crime later in life. A study released in 2009 of 10,000 Pre-K Counts Public/Private Partnership participants in Pennsylvania conducted by a Research Team at the University of Pittsburgh's Early Childhood Partnerships shows that at the start of Pre-K Counts, 21.5 percent of 3-year-old children were at-risk for problematic social and self-control behavior [meaning they scored low on those measures]. At the end of the program, only 3.6 percent of 3-year-old children were still at-risk. This decrease is important because research shows that 60 percent of children with persistent high levels of disruptive, aggressive behaviors in early childhood will manifest high levels of antisocial and delinquent behavior later in life.

Sheriff Behr is a member of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, the national anti-crime organization of police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, attorneys general and violence survivors, with more than 200 members in Pennsylvania and over 5,000 members nationwide.

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