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4,500 Police Chiefs, Sheriffs,
Prosecutors, other Law Enforcement
Leaders, and Violence Survivors
Preventing Crime and Violence

December 16, 2008

Dear Mr. Bassin:

As leaders on the front-line in the battle against crime, the 4,500 sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors, and victims of violence of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS know that the best way to prevent crime and strengthen our economy in the short- and long-term is to invest in programs that are proven to help kids get the right start in life. Their experiences on the front line against crime—and the research—show that among the most powerful weapons against crime are quality early childhood care and education. Unfortunately, our nation is far short of making the needed investment in these programs. For the first time in history fewer kids than their parents are graduating from high school and more than one in every 100 adults is now in jail or prison. The economic recession will only make things worse as more middle class families fall into poverty and more already-poor families fall deeper into poverty.

The research is clear that Head Start, Early Head Start and quality child care not only help close the achievement gap, but also prevent crime. At-risk kids who were left out of the high-quality High/Scope Perry preschool program were five times more likely to be chronic offenders (more than four arrests) by age 27 than those who participated. Yet, since 2002, funding levels for Head Start, Early Head Start and the Child Care Development Block Grant have been flat or have increased too slowly to keep up with inflation. As a result, programs have been forced to serve fewer kids or reduce the comprehensiveness of services. Nationally, Head Start serves just half of eligible, low-income kids, while Early Head Start serves fewer than 5% of eligible infants and toddlers. Only 1 in 7 kids in eligible, low-income families receives help from the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to pay for quality child care, and there are long waiting lists for child care help. 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.

As a country, we have rarely viewed early childhood development as a strategy for economic growth. But the dollars invested in early childhood development provide extraordinary returns compared with most other types of investments both in the short-term and the long-term. As Nobel Economics Laureate Dr. James Heckman wrote, “At current levels of public support, America under-invests in the early years of its disadvantaged children. Redirecting additional funds toward the early years, before the start of traditional schooling, is a sound investment in the productivity and safety of our society.”

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.

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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 will 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. In addition, with states currently cutting back on already inadequate funding for child care, many thousands of workers, especially single mothers, are likely to have to quit working because they can't afford 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.

Even more compelling is the long-term benefit: rigorous research shows that high-quality early care and education generate long-term returns on investment that are unparalleled and that are essential to the long-term productivity of the nation. For example, the Perry Preschool program cut crime, welfare, and other costs so much that it saved taxpayers more than \$16 for every \$1 invested. An analysis by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis shows that the program's annual return on investment is 16% after adjusting for inflation. Thus, an initial investment of \$1,000 in a program like Perry Preschool is likely to return more than \$19,000 in 20 years. But because only high-quality programs can achieve that level of return on investment and productivity enhancement, a substantial portion of any new investment should be directed toward quality improvement.

We are eager to work with President-Elect Obama and his incoming Administration in fulfilling his commitment to \$10 billion in new federal investments in quality early care and education. This can be accomplished through: at least \$3 billion for Head Start and Early Head Start, and at least \$3 billion for Child Care and Development Block Grants (for a total of at least \$6 billion) through the Economic Recovery package, and the remainder through the Fiscal Year 2010 federal budget and appropriations process.

Including this additional investment in the Economic Recovery package will allow over 162,000 more children to participate in Head Start, creating 80,000 Head Start jobs, and provide child care assistance for 480,000 children, creating approximately 190,000 child care jobs. 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.

Sincerely,

David S. Kass
President

Miriam A. Rollin
Chief Operating Officer