

NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF THE BUDGET TOWN HALL MEETING  
"ACHIEVING BALANCE THROUGH PRIORITIZATION"  
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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Francis and other distinguished members of the panel, thank you for your foresight to hold a hearing regarding state priorities in advance of the release of the budget. As you noted, this upcoming year will be fiscally challenging, forcing us to make many tough decisions. With the limited funds we have available, it is important that we ask ourselves, "where can we make investments that will give us the biggest return for our money?" I believe both research and my first-hand experience as a member of the law enforcement community can help shed light on some of these answers.

My name is Mark Spawn and I am the Chief of Police at the Fulton Police Department and a member of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS NEW YORK. Meredith Wiley, State Director of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS NEW YORK also joins me today. We represent the over 300 law enforcement leaders – chiefs of police, sheriffs and district attorneys, as well as crime survivors around the state of New York who are members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS NEW YORK (membership list attached). Our members believe in tough law enforcement. We know that dangerous criminals need to be locked up, but also realize that we aren't going to solve the crime problem by continuing to build jails and prisons. We have absolutely no doubt that, in the long run, the best way to keep our children, families and communities safe is to get kids on the right track, from the beginning and keep them there until they become productive adults. Research, as well as our first-hand experiences tells us this.

While I do believe in strict law enforcement, I also know that we cannot arrest and imprison our way out of the crime problem. The great challenge of policing is to identify that mix of proven prevention and enforcement strategies and tactics that work to make our communities safer.

## **“BREAK THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE & CRIME FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS”**

Unfortunately, at the point we arrest a juvenile or young adult, it is too late. We are too often arresting kids we have failed. We need to start earlier – before kids are too far off track. We realize that resources are scarce and that it just isn't possible to fund everything that may be worthwhile. Given this reality, New York's law enforcement leaders are urging you to ask yourselves the question “With the limited funds we have available, which investments will best serve all New York children? Which programs will give kids an opportunity for a good start in life and a fair chance to become successful, productive, contributing members of society?” To answer this question we are proposing the idea of maximizing certain leverage points that the research has identified to be effective in preventing and reducing crime in the long run. Our goal is to “break the cycle of violence and crime for future generations.”

### **KEEP KIDS ON TRACK BY TARGETING LEVERAGE POINTS**

Research has demonstrated that effective programming that prevents early child abuse and neglect, can cut crime in half. The research has also shown that targeted family therapy interventions that involve the parents as well as the youth who is in trouble can be equally successful, cutting re-arrest rates by nearly half. Our experience on the streets and in the courtroom has shown us that if we can focus our efforts and limited resources on helping prevent early child abuse and neglect and ensuring effective interventions for troubled youth we can break the cycle of crime and violence for the next generation. If you think about it, these programs and services target many of the same kids. It is not uncommon that the troubled male youth are the ones fathering the babies of the teen girls who are at high risk of abusing and neglecting their children. If we can help get the troubled teen boys back on track and ensure effective interventions for young moms to help them become safe and successful parents, then we can positively alter the trajectory of the next generation. We hope you will see this as an equally worthy goal and support and invest in the programs and services that we already know work.

### **REDUCE CRIME BY PREVENTING EARLY CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

The first leverage point that requires attention and resources is the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Even though the majority of children who are abused or neglected are able to overcome their maltreatment and become productive adults, many victims of abuse and neglect cannot. Not only are they more likely to abuse or neglect their own children, victims of abuse are also more likely to

become violent criminals. Research shows that, based on the nearly 71,000 confirmed cases of abuse and neglect in just one year, an additional 2,800 violent criminals in New York will emerge as adults who would never have become violent criminals if not for the abuse or neglect they endured as kids.

Fortunately, in-home parent coaching programs for parents of newborns, also known as home visiting programs, can help stop this cycle. They offer frequent home visits by trained individuals to help new parents get the information, skills and support they need to promote healthy child development and raise their children in a safe home. It's important to understand that these services are not mandated; qualifying mothers enter into them by choice. One of the most rigorously tested programs, the Nurse-Family Partnership, provides at-risk new moms with two and a half years of visits from trained nurses, beginning during pregnancy. Scientific research shows in-home parent coaching can be one of our strongest weapons in the fight against crime. Research, originally published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, shows that the Nurse-Family Partnership can *prevent* nearly half of abuse and neglect cases among at-risk children. That's not catching child abuse and neglect and responding to it - that's preventing it from ever happening in the first place.

In addition, evaluations of the Nurse-Family Partnership program beginning in Elmira, NY and two additional sites at Memphis, Tennessee and Denver, Colorado show a remarkable array of desirable outcomes: a reduction in low birth weight babies, a reduction in infant mortality, fewer subsequent pregnancies and longer intervals between subsequent births, a significant reduction in child abuse and neglect and significantly less time on welfare for the mother.

By the time those home-visited kids reach their teens, they have about 60% fewer arrests than the kids left out of the program. Home-visited kids are more prepared for school, have fewer hospitalizations for injuries and are less likely to have behavior problems, setting them up for success. Home-visited moms also benefit. They are more likely to be employed and are less likely to be arrested. There are currently 5 sites in New York City; one in Monroe County and one, I am glad to report, is in Syracuse that now has the capacity to serve 100 families and currently has 40 enrolled so far. It's a start, but there is a long way to go.

Another home visitation program, Healthy Families New York also provides frequent, home visits by trained individuals to help new parents get the information, skills and support they need to promote

healthy child development and raise their children in a safe home. The Healthy Families New York Program just released findings of a two-year evaluation that showed a positive impact on a number of risk factors such as fewer low birth weight babies, mothers reporting less use of physical punishment in disciplining children, less neglect, and reduced use of harmful substances.

Right now, the Nurse-Family Partnership program is funded through private dollars and draws down a 2:1 state match from the Community Optional Preventative Services (COPS) funding stream. This funding stream is critical to the continuation of this program and must be maintained. The Healthy Families New York home visitation programs is funded by a small funding stream in the Office of Children and Family Services budget and this funding source is also critical in ensuring that kids get the right start in life.

#### **REDUCE CRIME BY GETTING TROUBLED KIDS BACK ON TRACK**

Unfortunately looking at the juvenile justice end of the equation the picture is equally bleak, if not worse. Too many New York juveniles are becoming chronic, violent criminals. Fortunately, most youth arrested do not come back to court again. The reality is that we couldn't design a less-effective or more expensive system if we sat down and tried. The latest data shows that the average cost to incarcerate a juvenile in New York State is an estimated \$150,000 a year. Unfortunately, we aren't getting much for our money. One study of New York juvenile delinquents who were placed in state custody found disturbing results: "For males and females combined, *75 percent were arrested [again] for a felony or misdemeanor*, and 42 percent were arrested for a violent felony. We know that the programs and services that we invest in right now do not work to get these troubled kids back on track.

What we do know is that the most effective prevention and intervention programs utilize research-based approaches addressing the many factors relating to delinquent behavior and aim to change dangerous or delinquent behavior permanently. We aren't talking about being soft on these kids. These programs confront them with their behaviors and hold them accountable for doing the tough work involved in learning to manage their behavior and engage in positive activities. They also work with the parents to help them build the skills they need to better control their child. These programs often include mental health services and after-care services for the youths.

When youth exhibit serious behavioral problems and begin to engage in criminal activity, an

individualized intervention strategy can steer them back on track. One such program is the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) program. FFT works to engage and motivate kids and their families to change behaviors that often result in criminal activity. Research results have shown that kids whose families received FFT were half as likely to be re-arrested as the youths whose families did not receive the family therapy (26% vs. 50%).

But once kids have become more serious juvenile offenders, we know that more intensive intervention strategies are necessary to change criminal behavior and to prevent repeat offenses. The Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) program targets kids who are serious juvenile offenders by using an approach that addresses the multiple factors – in peer, school, neighborhood and especially family environments – that are known to be related to delinquency. One MST study found that kids who had *not* received MST were more than twice as likely to be arrested for a violent offense (30% vs. 14%).

But we also know that there are times when a kid does need to be removed from his home. Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care, or MTFC, provides services to youth offenders and their families when serious delinquent behavior occurs and a youth must be placed outside the home. MTFC provides specially trained foster parents and ongoing supervision by a program case manager, as well as frequent contact and coordination of services with a youth's parole or probation officer, teachers, work supervisors and other involved adults during and after a youth's out of home placement. Research shows that the MTFC approach successfully cuts the average number of arrests for seriously delinquent juveniles in half (2.6 arrests per teen vs. 5.4 arrests).

Unfortunately, there is only a handful of MST, FFT or MTFC programs across the state, not nearly enough to meet the demand. For example for the entire state of New York, there are only 50 MTFC beds.

#### **INVESTING STRATEGICALLY IS COST-EFFECTIVE**

Right now, we are paying a great price for failing to protect all of our kids from the beginning in more ways than one. As you know, the cost to get kids and families back on track is astronomical. According to 2003 numbers, child abuse and neglect costs New York State an estimated \$2.4 billion a

year which deals with primarily treatment and the social services that are need to deal with the consequences of abuse.

We know even more intimately the costs of kids who fall off the track. As I pointed out earlier, costs an average of \$150, 000 a year to house a youth in secure detention and the cost to incarcerate a young person in a New York City detention center is now over \$200,000 a year!

But we can turn these numbers around, if we refocus where we make our investments. Analysis by the Rand Corporation and the Washington State Institute for Public Policy determined that Nurse-Family Partnership generates over three dollars of savings for every dollar invested, with two-thirds of the savings derived from reduced crime. On average this amounts to more than \$17,000 in **net** savings for every family in the program. The RAND Corporation reported that Nurse-Family Partnership program pays for itself by the time the child is between three and four years of age.

Quality family therapy interventions like FFT, MST, MTFC have also been shown to have strong cost-benefit savings. Analysis shows that research-based approaches for cutting juvenile aggression and substance abuse problems reduce current custody costs and future crime so much they can *save an average of \$15,000 to \$75,000 per delinquent.*

#### CONCLUSION

As New York State law enforcement leaders, being tough on violent crime is not a question. But as members of FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS NEW YORK, we also know that a small investment now in helping get kids on track will reap dividends down the road by saving lives and money.

Once a crime has been committed, neither police nor prisons can undo the agony of a crime victim and repair the damage that has already been done to the community. To help “break the cycle of violence and crime for future generations” and keep our neighborhoods safe we need to use prevention and intervention strategies that have been proven effective. We know the leverage points in a kid’s life where we can make the most difference – now, we just need to invest in them.

We look forward to partnering with you to help keep New York safe. Thank you.