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New York State
Joint Senate Finance/Ways and Means Committees
Hearing on Health
February 8, 2012

Submitted by
District Attorney Richard McNally
Rensselaer County
ON BEHALF OF FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *NEW YORK*

Chairman DeFrancisco, Chairman Farrell and other distinguished members of the Committees, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Richard McNally. I am the District Attorney of Rensselaer County. I am here today on behalf of myself and my colleagues across the state to talk to you about home visitation. You may be mentally scratching your heads about now wondering why in the world a district attorney would be here testifying at a hearing on Health about a program for infants and toddlers. By the time I am done speaking, the answer will be crystal clear.

As district attorneys, we prosecute those who commit all types of crimes. But I can tell you from firsthand experience that the most disturbing, heartbreaking types of cases we handle involve a young child who has been abused or severely neglected. The truth about child abuse and neglect—the sheer scope of the problem—should shock the conscience of every New Yorker. In 2010, the last year for which we have data, over 77,000 children were abused or neglected in New York State. At least 114 of these kids actually died.

The injuries inflicted on these children are often unspeakable. All of us, far too often, have seen the headlines that periodically appear in the morning newspapers and on the evening news of a child who has died or been permanently injured. Hidden from view in these stories, however, is a price that we are all paying and is of great concern to those of us in law enforcement.

In addition to the grievous mental and physical injuries inflicted on young children who survive maltreatment, child abuse is a big driver of increased crime in our communities. While most kids who are abused or neglected never become violent criminals, experiencing abuse or neglect increases the risk by nearly 30 percent that a child will commit a violent crime later. In addition, children who have been abused are more likely to abuse their own children, creating a cycle of violence that becomes multi-generational. This is why, from a moral, fiscal and crime control perspective, law enforcement leaders want to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Are there things that we can do that will actually prevent child abuse and neglect? The answer is a resounding yes! We actually know a lot about how to do this. The problem is that we do not invest nearly enough in what we know works.

If we want to get serious about reducing child maltreatment, there are two important facts to understand that point us in the right direction.

- 1) Nationally, nearly 80 percent of children who died as a result of abuse or neglect in 2010 were 3 years old or younger and almost half were infants less than one year old, and
- 2) Children are more likely to be abused by a parent than any other person in their lives.

These two facts tell us that if we can provide early guidance and assistance to young parents most at risk, we have an opportunity to get out in front of this cycle before abuse occurs.

Voluntary home visiting services, such as Healthy Families New York and the Nurse Family Partnership have proven through years of rigorous research that they help pregnant mothers and new families avoid abusive behavior and raise healthy children. The proposed budget calls for maintaining funding for Healthy Families New York at last year's level of \$23.3 million. We appreciate the proposed level funding which will all this important program, including Healthy Families of Rensselaer Count, to continue to provide services at their present levels.

Nurse Family Partnership, however, has not fared as well. Despite, having the impressive results in preventing crime in the long term, Nurse-Family Partnership does not have a line item in the budget and has instead survived year-to-year by cobbling together state and local resources to fund just a handful of programs across the state.

Nurse Family Partnership is a highly effective program which pairs registered nurses with pregnant mothers on a voluntary basis. It provides coaching in parenting skills and on their child's overall health and development.

Decades of research, beginning in Elmira, N.Y. in 1976, have demonstrated that mothers who volunteered to receive the home visiting service were *only half as likely* to abuse or neglect their kids compared to similar mothers who did not participate. That is a 50% reduction in child abuse and neglect! This reduction in child abuse translates into a reduction later in crime. Children whose mothers did not participate had more than twice as many convictions by age 19, concentrated among the females.

Preventing child abuse and neglect translates into taxpayer savings including, reduced hospitalizations, increased school readiness and reduced crime. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy found that the Nurse-Family Partnership yielded a net taxpayer savings of almost \$21,000 for every family served. In fact, they even concluded that the Nurse Family Partnership program is among the evidence-based solutions that can prevent the need for building an additional prison.

That's why I, and my colleagues in law enforcement, strongly support Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg in his recent testimony before you requesting \$5 million for the Nurse Family Partnership Program in the Health budget. This service is currently delivering tangible, measurable outcomes to some of New York's most vulnerable families in all five of New York City boroughs, Rochester and Syracuse.

Law enforcement leaders across our state agree that safer communities begin with a safe and healthy start for kids. We have a moral obligation to protect children from child abuse and neglect. It is also in the best interests of public safety and fiscal prudence to do so. We urge the legislature to make the \$5 million in resources necessary to maintain the current level of Nurse Family Partnership services as a top priority.



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RESEARCH BRIEF

THE NURSE FAMILY PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM PREVENTS CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT, REDUCES CRIME AND SAVES MONEY

Groundbreaking research, initially conducted in Elmira, NY, shows that parent coaching in the homes of new at-risk young parents can be extraordinarily effective in reducing child abuse and neglect when provided with sufficient quality and frequency. The Nurse Family Partnership Program (NFP) randomly assigned half of a group of first-time young mothers to receive visits by carefully trained nurses. The nurses provided coaching in parenting skills and other advice and support. Starting in 1978, the women in the program received an average of nine home visits during their pregnancy and 23 visits from birth to their child's second birthday.

By age 15, child abuse and neglect was reduced by 48 percent for children in the program compared to the children left out of the program. There was a 59 percent reduction in the number of children arrested and a 61% reduction in arrests of the mothers who had received the in-home parent coaching services.¹

A replication of this study, also using a rigorous random assignment design, began in 1990 in Memphis. Compared to children in the program, the children whose parents did not receive the parent coaching and family support were significantly more likely to be hospitalized for injuries or ingestions. While children can certainly be injured without being abused or neglected, such extreme differences reinforce the findings of the earlier study in Elmira, NY. Moreover, in Memphis, hospitalized children who were not in the program sustained more serious injuries. For example, while seven of the 515 children in the group that did not receive parent coaching had fractures and/or head trauma requiring hospitalizations, none of the 228 children in the program were hospitalized for fractures or head trauma.² Finally, another replication underway in Denver is also generating strong positive results for the children.³

Because of such consistently strong results, first in Elmira and then at the two subsequent research sites in Memphis and Denver, The Nurse Family Partnership program has been selected by the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence as one of its "Blueprint" model programs.⁴

Investments made early in a child's life, particularly those that reduce abuse and neglect, reap large dividends. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) looked at the costs and savings of NFP and found that the program produced a net savings of almost \$21,000 for each family served.

¹ For outcomes on the mothers in the program, see: Olds, D. L. (1997). Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on maternal life course and child abuse and neglect. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(8), 637-643. For outcomes on the children in the program, see: Olds, D. L. (1998). Long-term effects of nurse home visitation on children's criminal and anti-social behavior: 15-year follow-up of a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 280(14), 1238-1244.

² Kitzman, H., Olds, D.L., Henderson, C.R., Hanks C., Cole, R., Tatelbaum, R., McConnochie, K.M., Sidor, K., Luckey, D.W., Shaver D., Engelhardt, K., James, D., Barnard, K., (August 27, 1997). Effect of prenatal an infancy home visitation by nurses on pregnancy outcomes, childhood injuries, and repeated childbearing. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 278(8), 644-652.

³ Olds, D. L., Robinson, J., Pettitt, L., Luckey, D. W., Holmberg, J., Ng, R. K., Isacks, K., Sheff K., Henderson Jr. C. R., (December 6, 2004). Effects of home visits by paraprofessionals and by nurses: Age 4 follow-up results of a randomized trial. *Pediatrics*, 114(6), 1560-1568. Retrieved on December 2, 2005 from www.pediatrics.org

⁴ See the Blueprints for Violence Prevention website: <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/>



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WHAT

Established in 1999, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS NEW YORK is a statewide, bi-partisan, non-profit anti-crime organization of 300-plus police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and violence survivors. It is part of the more than 5,500 member national organization, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS, headquartered in Washington, D.C.

WHY

The bi-partisan group's mission is to take a hard-nosed, skeptical look at the research about what really works – and what doesn't work – to get kids off to the right start in life and to keep them from becoming criminals. It then places that information in the hands of policy-makers, the media and the public. Strategies proven effective to prevent and reduce crime include child abuse and neglect prevention, early care and education programs and high quality after-school programs.

WHO

Our membership base represents law enforcement leaders from all around the state including the presidents of the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police, the New York State Sheriffs' Association and the New York State District Attorneys Association as well as other prominent law enforcement leaders. Among our crime survivor members are Janice Grieshaber-Geddes and Bruce Grieshaber of Syracuse, whose daughter, Jenna, was murdered by a paroled violent felon in Albany in 1997.

HOW

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS NEW YORK:

- Researches and evaluates the effectiveness of crime-prevention strategies
- Develops policy recommendations for effective crime-prevention
- Analyzes the crime-prevention impact of public policy proposals
- Educates policy-makers, media and the public about effective crime-prevention programs
- Represents members' crime-prevention recommendations at the state and national level
- Serves as an information clearinghouse for journalists, policy-makers and the public.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS receives no funds from federal, state or local governments.

As a non-profit organization, FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS is supported by tax-deductible contributions from foundations, individuals and corporations.

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