

Law enforcement urge senators to work for increased Head Start funding

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Leaders of Oregon's law enforcement community met with U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith last week and urged them to aggressively work for more federal funding for Head Start to prevent crime. The president of the Oregon State Sheriffs Association, Marion County Sheriff Raul Ramirez; the president of the Oregon District Attorney's Association, Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote, and Gresham Police Chief Carla Piluso met with the senators. They were accompanied by Martha Brooks, state director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Oregon, an organization of 137 police chiefs, sheriffs, district attorneys and violence survivors. In separate meetings with the senators, the law enforcement leaders pointed out that children from low-income families who attend Head Start are less likely to be held back in school, drop out, become teen mothers or commit crimes later in life. Piluso cited a study that tracked at-risk children who attended, and similar children who did not attend, the Chicago Child-Parent Centers, a high quality preschool program similar to Head Start. The study showed that by age 18, those who were left out were 70 percent more likely to have been arrested for a violent crime than those who attended. "I worry that if we do not make Head Start available to at-risk kids now, my officers may end up arresting them when they become adults," Piluso said. Oregon has been a leading state in expanding Head Start through Oregon Head Start Pre-Kindergarten. Gov. Ted Kulongoski recently proposed a significant increase in state funding, but more federal funds are needed if all of Oregon's at-risk 3- and 4-year-olds are to be served, Ramirez said. Last year, more than 6,400 eligible children from low-income families could not be served by Head Start in Oregon because of lack of funds. Nationally, Head Start serves only half of the eligible kids. That's less than five percent of eligible infants and toddlers that are served by Early Head Start due to inadequate funds. "When government fails to support proven crime prevention programs like Head Start, it forces law enforcement to fight crime with one hand tied behind our backs," Ramirez said. Brooks cited research showing that providing high-quality Head Start to the currently un-served kids in Oregon could return \$10 for every dollar invested—an estimated \$500 million in benefits to taxpayers, program participants and crime victims for every year of Head Start kids served. Besides increased funding to expand access to Head Start, the law enforcement leaders said Head Start needs funding to increase the education standards for teachers so that at least half have BA degrees. Research shows that kids do better when better-educated teachers teach them. Specifically, they asked Wyden and Smith to actively campaign for a federal budget that would fully fund Head Start for all eligible children, substantially expand access to Early Head Start for infants and toddlers and increase the number of highly educated teachers over the next five years. After the meetings, Foote said, "Senators Wyden and Smith have been strong supporters of law enforcement. We're counting on them to once again stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us by making sure that the federal budget fully funds Head Start to help all at-risk children get a good start in life and reduce future crime and violence."

Law enforcement urge senators to work for increased Head Start funding by Bend Weekly News Sources