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Advocates: Invest in youths

■ They claim the payoff is less crime, more successful adults

By DAVE GROVES
Of The Oakland Press

Not deterred by a state budget shortfall, roughly two dozen youth advocates are urging state and federal legislative representatives to invest in programs proven to prevent crime and foster success in children's lives.

BLOOMFIELD HILLS

Promoters of early childhood education, quality child care, parental support initiatives, police school liaison programs, youth recreation opportunities and other intervention efforts shared information with lawmakers this week about the successes and challenges they've faced in addressing the needs of at-risk children.

Several noted that various cuts in preventative program funding have compromised efforts to protect the health and welfare of children — this while the state continues to support a \$1.9 billion prison system.

"Fighting crime by building prisons is kind of like fighting cancer by building more cemeteries," said K.P. Pelleran, state director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids in Michigan.

Oakland County Prosecutor Dave



The Oakland Press photos/LOUIG BAUMAN

Community leaders and lawmakers met recently to discuss strategies aimed at preventing youth violence.

Gorcycya agreed.

"It's just deplorable that our logic is backwards," he said, arguing that funding youth and parenting programs has been shown to prevent many societal problems later.

Gorcycya cited a High/Scope

"If we want to look at the quality of care our children are receiving, we have to look at the parenting piece," Allen argued.

Several law enforcement officers advocated intervention efforts such as putting police liaison officers in

that most other state legislators will do as well.

"But when it comes to our budget deliberations, we can't seem to get it done," Donigan argued. She urged advocates to continue educating and winning the support of not only lawmake



K.P. Pelleran, state director of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Michigan, discusses ways to prevent teen violence.

Educational Research Foundation study of the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti. Authors found that at-risk children without quality preschool were five times as likely to become chronic lawbreakers as those who had it.

Additionally, the study found that for every \$1 invested in quality preschool, communities saved \$7 as a result of reduced crime, welfare and other costs.

Given the state of Michigan's economy, however, many families are struggling to find quality day care and pre-kindergarten programs they can afford.

"Child care is a real mixed bag right now based on the economy," said Susan Allen, director of the Oakland County Child Care Coordinating Council. She added that if children remain at home, society has an interest in ensuring that parents are able to support their needs.

schools. Southfield Police Chief Joe Thomas said such efforts prevent students from getting involved in devastating and even deadly criminal enterprises.

"We can only lock up so many people. We can only shoot so many people," Thomas said. "Let's stop the learned behavior and we won't have to arrest them later in life."

Thomas took issue with media organizations that convey the view of skeptics who say the problem is more complicated. He stressed that adequately funded programs are effective in reducing crime.

"It's just that simple," Thomas said. "They're saying it is much bigger than that, but it's not."

State Rep. Marie Donigan, D-Royal Oak, supports funding the "front-end" solutions advocates promote. She noted

out the public as well.

"We've got a lot of work to do in Lansing and we need your help," Donigan said. "Just keeping beating us until we tell you what you want to hear and do what you want us to do."

Several lawmakers noted that while child development programs should be deemed a top priority in Michigan, strained state tax revenues simply won't support all the initiatives advocates would like to see in place.

In light of this, state Sen. Gilda Jacobs, D-Huntington Woods, urged program supporters to seek support from the private sector.

"We can't do it alone — just with public funding," she said. "We need to take this show on the road."

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