

OPINION

Salem Police Chief Jerry Moore: Oregon must protect investments in early childhood programs

Jerry Moore, Guest Opinion Published Statesman Journal 4:29 p.m. PT May 29, 2020

When I announced my retirement plans last November, I had no idea what 2020 had in store for all of us.

While continuing to serve this city as Salem's Chief of Police, I knew I would certainly spend some time reflecting on my four decades in law enforcement and to thank the many men and women with whom I've been honored to serve with.

A global pandemic changed those plans.

Like so many of us, I have had to adjust to the single greatest public-health crisis of our lifetimes. The gratitude and respect I have for those fellow officers I mentioned a moment ago has only grown in recent months, as they've risen to challenge after challenge to do their part to help keep our community safe in the face of this pandemic.

But our community and our state now face another challenge - one that could have profound effects for years to come.

The pandemic has created economic impacts that will decimate state and local budgets. Without help, Oregon will face impossibly difficult decisions about what services and programs to scale back or eliminate.

State budget impact: [Economists urge Oregon lawmakers to maintain funding to public health, education](#)

In order to preserve our most critical programs, we must be open to all available options, including additional federal funding. I'm referring to expenditures connected to public safety and emergency response, such as fire, rescue, police, and health care services. All of these are vital to keeping our communities safe.

However, I'm also talking about programs related to long-term public safety: high-quality early childhood programs.

Being a long-time member of the law-enforcement membership group Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, as well as a board member of Family Building Blocks, I've been educated and better understand the value of investing in early childhood programs, such as pre-K, child care, and

home visiting. Research shows high-quality early childhood programs can help kids, especially at-risk kids, stay on a path toward educational and life success - and away from crime.

The positive effects of these programs can last decades. And a decision to cut or eliminate them will likewise impact an entire generation of Oregon kids, perhaps for the rest of their lives.

Specifically, early childhood practitioners, who in many cases are not adequately compensated, will be forced to seek employment outside the sector. They may never return. That depleted talent pool will further diminish quality, at the same time that access may also be severely cut.

Letters to the editor: [Campaign spending, reopening economy and schools](#)

Even worse, our kids' development won't suddenly "pause" if these programs do. Children in the first few years of life experience early brain development that is unprecedented and irreplaceable. That development will happen - or won't - during the same window of opportunity, whether these programs are in place.

If these kids can access high-quality early childhood experiences, they'll have a significantly better shot at attaining benefits that can help them stay successful and crime-free for the rest of their lives.

We can't afford to lose a generation of young children by damaging a system in a way that will take years to reverse. Those are the stakes.

From a crime-prevention perspective, or a human perspective, I hope lawmakers will entertain every possible option in order to maintain high-quality early childhood supports for our youngest learners, including additional federal funding if need be.



Salem Police Chief Jerry Moore (Photo: Courtesy of the Salem Police Department)

This pandemic has created challenges for all of us. We owe it to these children to rise to this one by protecting the investments that will help create a better future for them while making our communities safer.

Salem Police Chief Jerry Moore is a lifelong Salem-area resident with more than 43 years of law enforcement experience in Oregon, a member of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, and a Family Building Blocks board member. You may reach him at gmoore@cityofsalem.net