

Top cop seeks help for kids

York's police commissioner lobbied for early-childhood spending.

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May 31, 2007 — York Police Commissioner Mark Whitman urged lawmakers Wednesday to pump more money into early-childhood programs to help prevent kids from turning into criminals.

Whitman testified before the House Education Committee on a proposal from Gov. Ed Rendell to spend \$75 million next year on a program dubbed Pre-K Counts.

The program would target at-risk children and pay for pre-kindergarten care at Head Start or other approved child-care centers.

Rendell, a Democrat, wants the program funded in the 2007-08 budget that is due July 1, but he'll have to convince Republicans who say school districts should have more say over how to spend any state money sent their way.

Whitman, a member of the statewide anti-crime group Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Pennsylvania, said spending on police and prisons are not enough to make the streets safe.

Many criminals who are behind bars today didn't have the right start in life, Whitman said.

"What I'm here to say today is that any comprehensive plan for the reduction of crime must have this component. It must have an early-stage component," he said.

Rep. Chris King, D-Bucks, sponsor of the bill to enact Rendell's plan, said Whitman's testimony was convincing.

"Coming in here with a badge, you certainly made a statement," King said.

Rendell wants the pre-kindergarten funding to complement an existing program that spends \$350 million on school block grants. The block grants can go for many uses, such as lowering class sizes and training teachers.

The block grants can also pay for pre-kindergarten programs, and 4,000 children statewide benefit. The Rendell administration estimates an additional 11,000 children

statewide would benefit from his latest proposal.

Some Republicans say they don't oppose pre-kindergarten programs but want any new block grants to allow local officials to choose which programs are expanded in their district.

"Local districts know what they need to do to fill the only mandate they know, which is to educate," said Steve Miskin, spokesman for House Minority Leader Sam Smith, R-Jefferson.