

## Partnering with Law Enforcement to Advocate for Very Young Children

Reposted from [ZERO TO THREE Policy Center](#)

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Your early childhood program may be no stranger to collaborating with other government or nonprofit agencies, but have you considered partnering with your local law enforcement agencies? Law enforcement officers can be powerful allies when it comes to advancing public policies that protect the rights of infants, toddlers, and their families. The following is an *excerpt* of an interview with **John D. Wintersteen, Chief of Police, Paradise Valley,**

**Arizona** conducted by Kimberly Lucas, (former) Policy Intern in the ZERO TO THREE Policy Center.

### **What unique role can law enforcement officials play in influencing the public policy process on behalf of very young children?**

As a police chief, when I testify on contentious law enforcement issues in uniform, I have been treated rudely and questioned aggressively. But, when I go down to the state legislature in uniform to testify on matters pertaining to children, it is completely different. When it comes to children's issues, elected officials are very interested in my point of view as a police officer and especially as a police chief.

At a statewide police chief meeting where I made a presentation for [Fight Crime: Invest in Kids](#), the Town Marshal of Tombstone, AZ, asked me why he should spend his time trying to get the legislature to spend more money on kids, when our state was faced with a crisis in prison beds, for example. My response was that we must devote some of our resources, and a lot of our focus, to solving problems before they occur. It is not just about solving the problems of the day, such as prisons, by spending money on the consequences of crime. As law enforcement officers, we need to let our elected officials know that we support prevention, and that means dedicating money and energy to young children.

### **What advice would you give others in the law enforcement community who want to get involved in advocacy on behalf of infants, toddlers and their families?**

First, get the facts. The best way to get the facts is through organizations such as [Fight Crime: Invest in Kids](#), [ZERO TO THREE](#), and local advocacy organizations. Second, get involved with these organizations because you will find support, you will find like-minded individuals, and you will have the ability to use teamwork in approaching public policy issues related to kids.

### **How can infant-toddler professionals form partnerships with law enforcement officials to help make a difference in the lives of infants and toddlers?**

The best thing to do is go to your local police chief or sheriff and talk to him or her. That is where policy is made on an operational level, and in most states the chief's association and the sheriff's association have their own lobbyists. These organizations can pass resolutions of support on critical issues. Those resolutions may make a difference when they are put in the hands of elected officials who are making budget decisions, making program decisions, or deciding which laws to pass.

When you speak with your local sheriff or chief, find out what the problems are in your community and what local law enforcement is doing to address the issues. From there, you can figure out where child development professionals can help make a difference. The best way to begin a positive collaboration is to find someone who is like-minded in law enforcement and then getting that person to network with other law enforcement professionals.