

Letters to the editor, Jan. 24, 2012

Early childhood programs support national security

I was pleased to read the recent guest column by prominent law enforcement leaders across our region about why high-quality early education programs are so important to reduce future crime (Maine Voices, "To reduce crime, protect programs that put kids on right path," Jan. 14).

As a retired Army general, I would like to add that these programs are also important to our nation's security.

Appallingly, 75 percent of American citizens between the ages of 17 and 24 cannot join our armed services. There are three key disqualifiers: They have not finished high school, they are physically unfit or they already have a criminal record. This is a real threat to our military preparedness.

High-quality early education is one of the best ways to turn this around. Numerous national studies have shown that when the programs are of high quality, students who participate in early education have stronger academic performances and increased graduation rates.

Just as importantly, early education helps children develop curiosity, character and social skills – all key leadership qualities needed for success in the military or other careers.

I am concerned that policymakers in Augusta are not aware of these facts and are on the verge of making harmful decisions by imposing further cuts in early education programs such as Head Start.

I urge legislators to reject any proposed cuts to these programs in the supplemental budget so that our budget challenges do not create a national security crisis.

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