

House Committee on Finance

April 22, 2025

Testimony in support of HB 5765 AA Relating to Public Officers and Employees- Retirement System-Contributions and Benefits

Representatives O'Brien and Casey and Honorable Members of the House Committee on Finance:

My name is Brynna Blackston and I am a Parole Officer who supervises a specialized caseload of sex offenders who are either on probation, parole, or community supervision and in some cases, are supervised via GPS(Jessica Lunsford). I am writing to express my strong support for providing probation and parole officers with retirement benefits equivalent to those offered to the law enforcement professionals listed in HB 5765 AA Relating to Public Officers and Employees-Retirement System-Contributions and Benefits.

Every day, probation and parole officers serve on the front lines of public safety. They work directly with individuals who have committed serious offenses—some violent, many struggling with substance abuse, mental illness, sexual deviance or gang involvement. Officers often enter unstable environments, conduct unannounced home visits, and interact with individuals who may be unpredictable or confrontational. This is not office work—it is public safety work.

Unlike many law enforcement professionals, probation and parole officers are often alone, without the backup of a partner or immediate access to emergency response. They are expected to make split-second decisions, de-escalate potentially dangerous situations, and uphold the law—without the same advantages afforded to other law enforcement professionals or the public recognition that comes with the uniform.

The job is also emotionally and psychologically taxing. Officers witness firsthand the cycle of trauma, addiction, violence, sexual perversion and poverty. We are not only responsible for holding people accountable but ensuring the safety and security of the community by helping them reintegrate into society—a task that is both critical and incredibly complex. Burnout, stress-related illness, and PTSD are unfortunately all too common in this field.

Yet, despite facing many of the same risks as other law enforcement professionals listed in this bill, probation and parole officers are often excluded from the same retirement protections. This disparity does not reflect the reality of our work, and it fails to recognize the physical and emotional toll this career takes over time.

Fair and equitable retirement benefits would not only honor the dedication of our work but would also help recruit and retain qualified individuals for a demanding and essential role. When we talk about public safety, we cannot leave out the men and women who supervise those transitioning back into our communities. Our success directly impacts recidivism rates and community safety.

In conclusion, probation and parole officers are law enforcement professionals. We face danger. We manage risk. We protect the public. It is time to support us with the same dignity and security that is offered to the other law enforcement professionals listed in this bill.

Thank you for allowing probation and parole the opportunity to voice what our critical roles are within your communities.

Respectfully submitted,

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