

## **Regarding House Bill 5765: An Act Relating to State Affairs and Government – Retirement System – Probation and Parole Officers**

**Submitted to:** House Finance Committee  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

**Date:** April 22, 2025

**From:** Courtney Jansen, Former Rhode Island Probation Officer

Honorable Chair, members of the Committee,

My name is Courtney Jansen, and I am a former Probation Officer for the State of Rhode Island. I am writing to respectfully urge your support for House Bill 5765, legislation that would allow Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers to be considered for inclusion in a public safety retirement plan within the Municipal Employees' Retirement System (MERS). Given the nature of their duties and the risks they face daily in the service of public safety, which I will outline, this recognition is not only appropriate but, from my perspective having served in this role, is long overdue.

I want to start by offering a concise summary as to why Probation and Parole Officers are undeniably public safety officials. Unlike administrative roles, Probation and Parole Officers are personnel directly involved in managing and mitigating risk to the community. They supervise individuals convicted of crimes, enforce court orders and parole conditions, conduct investigations that inform judicial and parole decisions, and most significantly, they directly engage with offenders in their homes, workplaces, and communities, often in unpredictable and potentially dangerous environments. Their work is frontline public safety work, aimed at both offender accountability and community protection.

During my tenure as a Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officer, and still today as I observe my former colleagues, I can attest to the unique and demanding position these officers hold. They are tasked with supervising individuals convicted of crimes, ensuring their compliance with court-ordered conditions of probation and conditions of parole. While they utilize evidence-based practices to reduce recidivism – a critical component of public safety – they also bear the responsibility of reporting non-compliance (violations) directly to the courts or Parole Board. Their recommendations can and often do result in reincarceration, directly impacting public safety by returning high-risk individuals to correctional control when necessary.

Their duties extend beyond the office. They conduct background investigations and presentence reports, work that often takes them inside the state's prison. Crucially, they conduct announced and unannounced visits to a criminal justice involved person's home, place of employment, and engage with them in the community. This is where the public safety aspect is most visible and often most hazardous. During the execution of these duties, officers are exposed to a range of environments, often including high-risk homes and neighborhoods. They routinely encounter volatile situations, individuals experiencing mental health crises, significant substance abuse issues, and unfortunately, direct threats to their personal safety. This includes exposure to weapons like guns and knives, uncontrolled animals, active drug use, and ongoing criminal activities. It is standard protocol that officers wear ballistic vests during these field duties to mitigate risk. Furthermore, they are certified in the use of Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray as a defensive tool,

underscoring the reality that physical confrontations and the need for self-defense are potential aspects of the job. They work closely with local, state, and federal law enforcement agents, not just for home visits but specifically to conduct 4th Amendment waiver compliance checks to monitor adherence to court-ordered conditions.

In the Parole division, officers administer urine toxicology screens, are on-call, monitor GPS and SCRAM remote breathalyzers for parolees, and must respond immediately to parole violations. They are the ones who initiate and obtain revocation warrants when necessary to apprehend non-compliant individuals. I recall, and the practice continues, transporting newly released parolees from the ACI to their office – often in standard vans that lack protective cage barriers, placing officers in close, unsecured proximity to individuals just released from incarceration.

Beyond the inherent dangers of direct interaction and enforcement, the profession is both physically and emotionally demanding in ways that mirror other public safety roles. Officers are required to remain hyper-vigilant, adaptable, and responsive under pressure. Maintaining composure and professionalism in unpredictable and often high-stress environments is not merely a job requirement; it is essential for safety. These demands take a significant toll over time. As officers age, the cumulative impact of stress, potential exposures, and physical requirements can sadly lead to increased rates of injury, burnout, and long-term health issues, including mental health and substance use challenges. Requiring officers to work until the current standard retirement age of 67 under these conditions places an undue burden on individuals who have spent their careers in demanding, high-stress, public safety roles.

House Bill 5765 would provide long-needed recognition of these challenges and align the retirement benefits for Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers with those of other public safety professionals, such as municipal police officers, state troopers, and correctional officers, who are rightfully acknowledged for the similar risks and demands of their roles. Based on the essential, demanding, and often dangerous work that Probation and Parole Officers perform daily, as I have described, this bill is entirely appropriate. Passing this bill is not just about retirement; it's about valuing the critical work these officers perform to keep our communities safe.

Having served alongside these dedicated men and women, I have witnessed firsthand the commitment and the risks they undertake. I urge you to support House Bill 5765 and advocate for those who continue to serve on the front lines of justice and rehabilitation every single day in Rhode Island. Their work is vital to public safety and deserves the appropriate recognition and benefits afforded to other public safety professionals.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Courtney Jansen, Former Rhode Island Probation Officer

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Cjansen", written in dark ink.