

Dear House Finance Committee,

Firstly, I want to thank you for taking the time to hear this bill on our behalf. It's something of great importance to us as Probation and Parole Officers. From my understanding, our director is working on expanding our roles and bringing us in the direction of becoming Peace Officers.

We are a big part of public safety. Our roles involve enforcing court orders, ensuring our Probationers/Parolees abide by state laws, focusing on the safety of the communities and our people, and working towards helping criminal justice involved individuals get rehabilitated and become productive members of society. Most of our work involves being face to face with people who have been arrested, charged with crimes, and who have served time in prison.

We receive phone calls from the community regarding our offenders, and it's our job to investigate allegations and determine how to handle issues as they arise. It's our job to determine if a violation is to be entered to bring the offender in front of the court and make recommendations for sentencing to address any behaviors that are not in the best interest of the public. At the end of the day, Public Safety is the number one priority, and our violations are a big part of removing unsafe offenders from being out in the public.

We go into the community, into their homes, with no protection, to do our jobs. During the day, we Probation/Parole Officers go out alone to these houses. We have no hand cuffs, no weapon or device for protection, and "bullet resistant" vests. When I've gone on home visits with Police Officers at nighttime, they typically send me to the door first to knock on the doors and have the first interaction with my offender. I direct the conversation, know their conditions, know if they have a no contact order and with whom so I can advise the Police if an arrest needs to be made or at least give them a heads up that one may need to be made.

When I enter a home, I have no way of knowing if there are any knives, guns, or other weapons readily accessible to our offenders. I have no way of knowing if there is anyone else in the home who may be a danger to myself or fellow Officers. We must be alert and aware, and we take that risk every day even in our own offices. Police Officers and firefighters encounter many citizens every day, but most of them are law abiding and are not criminals. I supervise a caseload of over 100 offenders, my job mainly involves working with people who have been convicted of crimes, and at times speaking with their victims.

We are at risk every meeting with have, every home visit we make, and yet we have no protections if something were to happen. Our offenders know at times we are the deciding

factor of whether they are being released to go home, or if they are going to prison. We may not have gone through an academy, but there are a lot of trainings we have gone to, we assist with Role Plays at the Municipal Police Academy for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault situations, we partner with law enforcement on a constant basis for the good of the community. In time, we may have our own academy to go through so that we can better protect ourselves and those around us and be able to enforce warrants.

DHS workers help those in need to get resources – food, insurance, daycare, etc. Their role is to assist the public, and they are not just criminal justice involved individuals that they work with. Some DHS workers don't ever come face to face with the public either. BHDDH is in place to deliver services and assist those in need, and they typically have security and other safety nets in place. Judiciary staff are protected by the Sheriff's. In our office in Pawtucket, we have no metal detectors, no security, no police, no one checking if any of our offenders have weapons on them.

Our job is very demanding, and we are constantly in potentially dangerous situations. But, if someone assaults us, it's no different than them assaulting another individual on the streets with the way our role is currently defined. A public safety officer is defined as an individual who works for a public agency to protect people and property. Our job is to protect the community while supervising probationers/parolees, to investigate allegations, and to enforce court orders to protect people and property. We carry a badge, "Officer" is in our title, we work with Law Enforcement engaging with the same offenders that they do, and work for a public agency to protect the community – but we have no protections, are expected to work to a much older age than our counterparts, and to retire with a much lower pension even though we face the same dangers? It does not make sense.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jessica Brightman".

Jessica Brightman

Probation & Parole Officer II