

**From:** Ruiz, Lorraine (DOC) <Lorraine.Ruiz@doc.ri.gov>  
**Sent:** Monday, April 21, 2025 3:31 PM  
**To:** House Finance Committee  
**Subject:** HB 5765

Dear Representative O'Brien,

In regard to House Bill 5765:

Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers should indeed be considered **public safety professionals**, and our roles often involve **high-risk, demanding work environments** that can contribute to **elevated injury rates**.

### **1. Direct Interaction with High-Risk Individuals**

We, probation and parole officers supervise individuals who have been convicted of crimes, many of whom have histories of **violent behavior, mental health issues, or substance abuse problems**. These individuals can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous.

- **Confrontational situations:** Officers often must enforce compliance with court-ordered conditions, which can lead to volatile encounters.
- **Unannounced visits:** We visit parolees/probationers in their homes or communities, exposing us to unsafe environments.

### **2. Fieldwork in Uncontrolled Environments**

Unlike many public safety roles that work within structured systems (e.g., police in patrol units, correctional officers in secure facilities), probation and parole officers frequently operate in **uncontrolled, unfamiliar, and sometimes hostile environments**.

- We enter **high-crime neighborhoods, drug houses, or unstable domestic situations**.
- There's often **no immediate backup**, making us vulnerable in dangerous circumstances.

### **3. Psychological and Emotional Demands**

In addition to physical danger, the **mental strain** of constantly monitoring individuals who are often resistant to change, or manipulative can take a toll:

- We manage **caseloads that are often too large**, leading to **stress and burnout**.
- The pressure to **prevent recidivism** and protect the community while helping offenders reintegrate is a delicate balance.

### **4. Lack of Public Awareness and Understaffing**

Probation and parole officers are often **undervalued** compared to police, sheriffs, or correctional officers, despite similar risk exposure:

- **Understaffing** leads to heavier caseloads, increasing stress and exposure to dangerous situations.
- **Budget limitations** often mean less training, outdated equipment, or insufficient safety protocols.

## 5. Injury Risks

Because of all the factors above, Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers face a range of **injury risks**:

- **Physical injuries** from slips/falls during home visits, or accidents during fieldwork.
- **Psychological injuries** like PTSD, anxiety, or depression from constant high-stress situations.
- **Cumulative stress injuries** due to sedentary desk work combined with intense field activity.

Probation and parole officers play a **critical role in maintaining public safety** by supervising offenders in the community and helping prevent recidivism. Our job requires a mix of **social work, counseling, and law enforcement**, all while navigating unpredictable and potentially dangerous circumstances. Given the **mental, emotional, and physical toll**, we absolutely deserve to be recognized as **public safety professionals** working in **demanding and high-risk jobs**—comparable in many ways to police officers, firefighters, correctional officers, and sheriffs.

Thank you for your time.

**Lorraine Ruiz, LCSW**

Adult Probation and Parole Officer - 24 years