

Chris O'Brien

From: Pouliot, Michele (DOC) <Michele.Pouliot@doc.ri.gov>
Sent: Monday, April 21, 2025 3:46 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Cc: Michele Pouliot
Subject: HB 5765 - Probation & Parole

Good afternoon Mr. O'Brien,

My name is Michele Pouliot-Holland. I am writing to you about the HB 5765 that is being heard on Tuesday, 4/22/25 at the House Finance Committee, in an effort to place Probation and parole Officers with MERS employees, who enjoy a more lucrative pension, with higher pension accrual rates and a younger retirement age.

On 4/1/2025 I celebrated 30 years with the State of Rhode Island. During that 30 years I have held many positions – all the way from temporary clerical positions, permanent state service that I obtained in 1995 as a clerical, Parole Board Field investigator, Probation & Parole Officer and a Probation and Parole Officer Supervisor (current). Our job in Probation & parole is to ensure public safety and to enforce the sentences imposed on offenders by the Courts in RI. As a result, we have daily, face-to-face contact with these individuals. This face-to-face contact happens in many ways. We see these offenders in Court, in the hallways/elevators/parking lots at Court, in our offices, during homes visits, during informational forums, to name a few. Many times, the interaction we have with these offenders can be tense, stressful and volatile. The reasons for this can vary. Many of our offenders suffer from mental illness, substance abuse issues, problems with authority and PTSD. As a result, Probation and parole become the focus point for much of their anger, frustration and the outlet for their underlying issues. We are the ones making sure they tow the line, and many of them don't like that. When it comes to ensuring their compliance, they can be under threat of violation if they fail to do so, and that makes the PO the "bad guy". When in court, we are tasked with making recommendations about putting offenders in jail and serving sentences at the ACI. This is done in open court, on the record, in front of not only the offender but their attorney and any family/friends they may have in the audience. This can put a target on us. I can speak personally about an issue that happened to me. When covering Court, I served an offender with a violation (that included my full name on it) and I made a recommendation that he serve time at the ACI. A person in the audience overheard this offender's family member say that I should be "shot" because of this recommendation. These words were reported to the police and sheriffs in the courtroom and charges were filed against this individual. However, because I am not covered under Public Safety, this person was only charged with "disorderly conduct" and was placed on 6 months Probation as opposed to being charged with Making a Threat to a Public Official. I was contacted by the RIDOC Special Investigators regarding this, as my safety was at risk. I had to contact my local police department to advise them in case anything happened to me. Barry Weiner, RIDOC Assistant Director, had contacted me in late 2019, early 2020 as we were going to testify before the House to tell this story in a way to justify us being part of Public Safety. Unfortunately, due to COVID, that never happened.

I understand that this has been before the House in the past. There was a statement made by Rep at the time that all Probation & Parole Officers do is "sit behind a desk and cover court". I would suggest to you that this is a highly uneducated and narrowly viewed statement. We are exposed to verbal abuse daily. The Secondary Trauma we experience from the stories that we have to listen to when we finally do get an offender to open up to us are ones that we carry with us for years, and sometimes our whole lives. This takes a huge toll on our own mental health. As public servants, we are constantly asked to do more with less, and the stress and

burnout rates are skyrocketing. Now as a Supervisor, I am tasked with taking care of the Probation Officers online and it has been one of the most challenging things in my career to date. All this with 30 years on the job, and due to pension reform, I have to work another 11 more years in order to retire. I would suggest to you that this is not only a threat to my personal mental health, but I am not doing my best work after 43 years of service. I would suggest that nobody is!

I am sorry that I am unable to attend this hearing, but I am urging that this pass the house and that the legitimacy of our work be recognized. Thank you for your time

Michele Pouliot-Holland
Probation & Parole Supervisor
30 years of service.