

From: Pamela Hughes <hpch21@aol.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 22, 2025 8:35 AM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: HB5765-Relating to Public Officers and Employees-Retirement System-Contributions and Benefits

Dear Representative O'Brien,

This letter is in support of House Bill 5765 to add probation and parole officers to the list of state law enforcement professionals for the purpose of retirement on service allowance.

The Mission and Vision Statement of Probation and Parole is as follows:

The Rhode Island Department of Corrections Probation and Parole Unit will increase **PUBLIC SAFETY** by promoting positive change in offender behavior, successfully reintegrating offenders into society and assisting victims of crime while upholding our core values and ethics. To reduce crime, recidivism and victimization by motivating offenders to become productive and law-abiding members of society.

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 or conditions set by the RI Parole Board, which can lead to volatile encounters.
- **GPS and Breathalyzer Monitoring:** which if violated can lead to requesting a warrant and return to the ACI. Most times these individuals are brought into PO Offices to await their return to the ACI, which at times have lead to escalated confrontations.
- **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, unaware of what lies in wait as we enter.**
- 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.

Thanking you in Advance,

Pamela C. Hughes

Adult Probation and Parole Officer-25 years