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April 21, 2025

**The Honorable Christopher O'Brien**  
Finance Committee  
State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Representative O'Brien,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for **House Bill 5765**, which would allow **Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers** to be considered for MERS benefits. This recognition is not only appropriate but long overdue, considering the nature of our duties and the risks we face daily in the service of public safety.

Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers hold a unique position in the state. We supervise individuals convicted of crimes by the criminal justice system to ensure compliance with court-ordered conditions of probation and conditions of parole. We use evidence-based practices to reduce recidivism, however, we also report non-compliance (violations) directly to the courts or Parole Board and make recommendations regarding sentencing, which may result in reincarceration. We can also request the modification of probation conditions or conditions of parole, when applicable. We are the only state employees who can serve a defendant in court with a 32F, a violation of probation resulting from a new criminal charge, at which time we may make sentencing recommendations as to the violation of probation.

When I began my employment with the Department of Corrections, I was a probation officer with a generic caseload with approximately 170 active cases and another 100 or more low supervision cases. In less than two years, I moved to a sex offender-specific caseload, a specialized caseload dealing with only sexual offenses. The case load was smaller and generally stayed around 70 to 75 cases. Seven years ago, I moved to a sex offender-specific parole caseload. I supervise parole cases, GPS Jessica Lundsford cases, community supervision cases, and computer crimes.

During each office visit, I conduct risk assessments while conducting in-depth report sessions, reviewing progress in counseling reports, and simultaneously providing supportive interventions while assessing for patterns of maladaptive behaviors. We conduct announced and unannounced visits to the defendant's home, place of employment, and in the community. We may go by ourselves, in pairs, or with local or state police, or the US Marshals, which can increase the risks associated with the job. During the execution of our duties, we are exposed to a range of environments, often including high-risk homes and neighborhoods, where we encounter volatile situations, mental health crises, substance abuse issues, and threats to our personal safety (guns,

other weapons, uncontrolled animals, drug use, and criminal activities). On occasion, defendants have brought weapons to our offices. Many officers wear bulletproof vests in the field, and some are trained in the use of Oleoresin Capsicum (OC) spray. During our work with local, state, and federal law enforcement agents, there are times when information is discovered leading to an arrest on a warrant or a new criminal offense.

In Parole, our officers can administer urine toxicology screens, are on-call and monitor GPS units to track our parolees and work on-call rotations to respond immediately to parole violations 24/7, and obtain revocation warrants when necessary. We conduct pre-release investigations for inmates being released on parole and interstate investigations for defendants who want to move to Rhode Island and either approve or deny the placement. We also conduct presentence reports; our work often brings us into the state's prisons.

As Probation and Parole Officers, we spend a great deal of time reviewing graphic and detailed police reports. As a sex offender-specific officer, this takes an emotional toll. The details in the reports are often unimaginable to the general public, however, it is necessary to continuously review the reports to ensure familiarity with patterns of behavior surrounding the crime, as well as the victim types and who the victim was. We must also connect with the victims upon the defendant's release from prison and remain connected to address any concerns the victim may have. We must also interface with the defendant's family, employer, victims, and the general public to ensure defendant and public safety.

Beyond the inherent dangers, the profession is both physically and emotionally demanding. We are required to remain hyper-vigilant, adaptable, and responsive under pressure, all while maintaining composure and professionalism in unpredictable and often high-stress environments. We must manage defendants who make overt threats or vague and veiled comments hinting at ours or our family's safety. There are elevated penalties under the law if we are assaulted in the line of duty, but many of these acts do not rise to the level of assault. These demands take a toll over time, and as officers age, the cumulative impact can lead to **increased rates of injury, burnout, mental health or substance issues, long-term health issues**, particularly when required to work until the current retirement age of 67.

**House Bill 5765** would provide long-needed recognition of these challenges and align our retirement benefits with other public safety professionals, such as law enforcement and correctional officers, who are rightfully acknowledged for the similar demands of their roles.

Thank you for your time and commitment to serving the people of Rhode Island. I urge you to support House Bill 5765 and advocate for those of us who serve on the front lines of justice and rehabilitation every day.

Sincerely,  
**Tracy LaPointe Webber**  
**Probation and Parole Officer**  
**Department of Corrections**