

April 15, 2026

Finance Committee  
Senate Finance - State House (room 211)  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Respected Members of Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for **House Bill H-7685**, which would allow **Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers & Supervisors** 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.

Probation Officers in this state do a remarkable job every day for the taxpayers of Rhode Island. The DOC 2025 expenditures report states Community Corrections makes up 7% of the total DOC budget. Probation and Parole is a portion of that 7%. With that small percentage we can manage the over 16,000 Probationers we oversee every day. Conversely the DOC has approximately 2300 inmates on an average day. The custody and security budget makes up approximately 58% of the budget. This makes Probation and Parole on the most cost-efficient portions of the DOC budget. Probation officers are in every community in this state every day. We are in people's homes, places of employment, and the community. We do this without arrest powers, armed with a vest and sometimes OC spray. Probation Officers are well versed in de-escalation techniques and approach all probationers with a rehabilitative lens. We want the people under our care to succeed. We work with individuals who often are suffering from mental illness or substance abuse issues. We work with high-risk sex offenders and domestic violence offenders. This bill would show support for these Officers and the work they do every day. The Director has a strategic plan for the Department going forward. The following are goals the department has set.

- 1.) Ensure effective population management.
- 2.) Enhance successful re-entry of individuals to communities.
- 3.) Increase the effectiveness of probation and parole supervision by expanding upon the evidence-based practices currently being used by community corrections staff.

All these goals will require participation and buy in from Probation and Parole. If this bill does not pass, the message to those Officers is they do not matter as much as other groups. Staff motivation will decrease making it difficult to move the strategic plan forward over the next five years.

These folks already do an unbelievable job daily and will continue to work hard for the taxpayers of Rhode Island. Please pass this bill so the Department can fulfill its goals and Officers are recognized for their professionalism.

**Senate Bill S-00661** 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.

I urge you to support **Senate Bill S-00661** and advocate for those of us who serve on the front lines of justice and rehabilitation every day.

Sincerely,

*Erin Isherwood*

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