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Dear Finance Committee Chair,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for H7685, which seeks to recognize the critical role of Probation and Parole Officers and Supervisors in Rhode Island's criminal justice system by formally classifying us as "public safety personnel" under state law and policy.

In 2025, Probation and Parole Officers and Supervisors in Rhode Island were responsible for supervising over 16,000 individuals serving sentences in the community, in addition to more than 300 parolees. These figures reflect not only the scale of our responsibilities, but also the significant impact we have on public safety across the state. Our work takes place directly within the community each day, often under challenging and potentially dangerous conditions. We frequently operate alongside law enforcement on the front lines, yet we are not afforded the same recognition, protections, or benefits as other public safety professionals.

Probation and Parole Officers play a vital role in safeguarding the public by enforcing court-ordered conditions, monitoring behavior, coordinating treatment and rehabilitation services, and intervening when necessary to reduce risk and promote positive outcomes. Our efforts are essential to reducing recidivism and supporting long-term community safety. Every day, officers go above and beyond in service to the Department of Corrections, the individuals we supervise, and the taxpayers of Rhode Island.

Despite these responsibilities, Probation and Parole Officers and Supervisors are not currently classified as "public safety" personnel under Rhode Island law. This misclassification limits access to fair compensation, retirement benefits, critical training, and necessary equipment. It also undermines our ability to respond effectively and safely in high-risk situations.

Notably, in calendar year 2025, Rhode Island ranked second highest in the nation for the number of individuals on probation and parole. These demands place extraordinary pressure on officers and supervisors, yet current classifications fail to reflect the level of responsibility and risk involved.

Given the essential nature of our work, I respectfully urge you to support H7685 and ensure that Probation and Parole Officers and Supervisors are formally recognized as public safety personnel. This designation is vital to providing the support, protection, and recognition necessary to carry out our duties effectively and safely. Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued commitment to public safety in Rhode Island.

Sincerely,

Probation & Parole Officer Linda Bessette

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