

May 12, 2026

Finance Committee
Senate Finance Committee – State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I am writing to respectfully urge your support for Senate Bill S-2446, which would allow Rhode Island Probation and Parole Officers and Supervisors to be considered for MERS benefits. This recognition is both appropriate and long overdue given the nature of our responsibilities and the risks we face daily in the service of public safety.

Probation Officers in Rhode Island perform extraordinary work every day on behalf of the taxpayers of this state. According to the Department of Corrections FY2025 expenditures report, Community Corrections accounts for approximately 7% of the total DOC budget, with Probation and Parole representing only a portion of that amount. Despite this relatively small allocation, Probation and Parole Officers supervise more than 16,000 probationers statewide each day. By comparison, the DOC houses approximately 2,300 inmates on an average day, while custody and security operations account for approximately 58% of the DOC budget.

This demonstrates that Probation and Parole is among the most cost-effective components of the Department of Corrections.

Our officers work in every community throughout Rhode Island. We conduct home visits, workplace visits, field contacts, and community supervision daily. We perform these duties without arrest powers and with limited protective equipment, often relying only on a vest and OC spray. At the same time, officers are expected to manage high-risk offenders, including individuals convicted of domestic violence and sex offenses, while also working with many people struggling with mental illness and substance abuse.

Probation Officers are highly trained in de-escalation techniques and approach supervision through a rehabilitative lens. We want the individuals under our supervision to succeed and become productive members of the community. This work requires professionalism, patience, sound judgment, and a constant awareness of personal safety risks.

Passage of this bill would demonstrate meaningful support for the officers who carry out these responsibilities every day. The Department's strategic plan outlines several important goals moving forward:

1. Ensure effective population management.
2. Enhance successful re-entry of individuals into communities.
3. Increase the effectiveness of probation and parole supervision through expanded evidence-based practices.

Achieving these goals will require the full participation, commitment, and morale of Probation and Parole staff. Failure to pass this legislation sends the message that these officers are valued less than other public safety professionals, despite the critical role they play in protecting Rhode Island communities and reducing recidivism.

Senate Bill S-2446 would provide long-overdue recognition of the demands and risks associated with this profession and would align our retirement benefits more closely with those provided to other public safety professionals, including law enforcement and correctional officers, whose duties involve similar challenges.

Probation and Parole Officers will continue to work hard for the people of Rhode Island regardless of the outcome. However, passing this bill would affirm the professionalism, dedication, and sacrifices of these officers and help ensure the Department can successfully fulfill its long-term mission.

I respectfully urge you to support Senate Bill S-2446.

Sincerely,

Christopher Hebert

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