



## Probation Association of New Jersey

*Serving New Jersey Since 1904*

*An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association*

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March 18, 2010

## **PROBATION ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY STATEMENT REGARDING PROPOSED 2010 PENSION AND BENEFITS REFORM BILLS**

**Dwight Covalleskie, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Line Staff**

**Brad Fairchild, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President, Supervisors**

Good morning Chairwoman Pou, members of the Assembly Appropriations Committee, my name is Dwight Covalleskie, representing the Probation Association of New Jersey (PANJ), along with my colleague, Brad Fairchild. While we understand the current condition of the State's finances, we do not support the legislative package put forth today. We recognize the effort to pass a wide-range of state pension and benefits reforms in the immediate future as a means of saving tax dollars, but we believe these bills unfairly diminishes benefits for middle-class working men and women.

In 2008, our union negotiated our current contract in good faith. At that time, we made significant concessions, many included in these measures to encompass more public employees. We are dismayed that in the year-and-a-half since those negotiations we are now faced with more sweeping changes to our pension and benefits.

We have done our share to cut costs and find ways to save the state money in the pension system by agreeing to pay for a portion of health benefits and pension; by taking furlough days; and by reducing the number of paid holidays among other "givebacks." All of these things have taken money out of the paychecks of the 2,800 probation officers and supervisors we represent.

If anyone here thinks that we have a cushy job, then we will be happy to take them into the dangerous neighborhoods where we go with nothing more than pepper spray. Our members are middle-class men and women who signed up for tough jobs. None of us are going to make it rich by working for the probation system. We supervise criminals in dangerous neighborhoods, make sure child support payments are made, and work to carry out justice in court rooms. But yet, we have been broadsided over the course of the last four years with constant reductions in the benefits we work so hard to earn. Enough is enough.

Included in this package of bills are measures that would now take money out of our pensions by changing the calculation and take away programs like the sick leave injury program. Where will the so-called reforms stop? When will our givebacks be enough?

Every day leaders in our union are asked my members if they should retire because they quite simply can't afford to keep doing the job they have while the value of their employment package is destroyed. What are we supposed to tell these individuals? Because public employees like probation officers are painted with the broad brush claiming that we are the cause of the state's fiscal problem, we are going to lose very dedicated probation officers who will leave the system simply because they fear what the next "reform" package may be.

We understand that we are here today to discuss the content of these pension reforms but we would be remiss to not address the anti-public employee and anti-union messages we heard in the Governor's budget address this week. Governor Christie stated in his speech that he believes the pension calculation, which is part of this package for future retirees, also should include current employees. We believe this completely flies in the face of the contract we signed just two years ago and would violate our agreement.

He also stated that he believes that the civil service system should be optional. We wholeheartedly disagree with this proposal. Civil service was created to guard against corruption and cronyism in government. We should not be opening the door to the return of the days when workers could lose their job and be replaced by a relative or fired for no cause. Even more shocking is that this budget once again will not require the State to pay its fair share into the pension system.

Members of this committee, we understand that the State of New Jersey is in dire financial straits. We see it every day in our work and in our own lives. But, we cannot stand idly by while middle-class public employees are made the scapegoats and continuously stripped of their retirement and health benefits.

Thank you for your time this morning and we will be happy to answer any questions.