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## Probation Association of New Jersey

*Serving New Jersey Since 1904*

*An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association*

United Professional Center, Unit 2-20

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March 16, 2009

Honorable Jon S. Corzine  
Governor, State of New Jersey  
State House  
P.O. Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625

### **Re: Furlough/wage freezes for probation officers**

Dear Governor Corzine:

As the labor union representing an estimated 2,800 probation officers and supervisors, we listened intently to your budget address and plan to implement employee furloughs and wage freezes. While we understand the state's current financial situation and need to cut costs, we are deeply concerned about this plan, or potential layoffs, that would jeopardize our ability to effectively and efficiently supervise offenders in the community.

First, the members of the Probation Association of New Jersey view furloughing community supervision and law enforcement officers as a great danger to public safety. We are concerned that the furlough days will essentially become a holiday for the estimated 139,000 adult and 15,000 juvenile offenders. Probationers will know that their officers will not be actively supervising them on those furlough days and see it as a free pass to fall out-of-line with their responsibilities.

Our caseloads are already averaging more than 180 cases per officer which makes daily contact with potentially dangerous probationers impossible. In addition, furlough days would create a lapse in daily activities such as family court officers enforcing domestic violence orders or monitoring bail levels. An officer losing contact with all probationers for even one day a month will send a strong message that constant supervision is not critical.

The probation system is historically understaffed and there are many staff vacancies as a result of early retirement and a lack of new hires. Crime rates begin to rise, as history indicates during times of deep recession, and we believe that these "new" criminals will end up on probation. In fact, recent news reports have commented on the noticeable increase in bank robberies. Our system will be stretched to a breaking point by an influx of cases while officers are asked to curtail supervision hours.

A study conducted by the Pew Center on the States shows that 66 percent of New Jerseyans under correctional control are under state probation supervision. On average, the national cost to supervise an offender on probation is \$1,250 per year compared to \$29,000 to incarcerate an individual. We realize the need for the state to tighten its belt in this economic climate. However, we unequivocally believe that an investment in the probation system will save tens of thousands of dollars as well as keep offenders from falling further into the corrections system. Furloughing probation officers to see immediate savings will ultimately add to the sky-rocketing costs of incarceration.

Second, you are likely aware that just weeks ago we ratified our employee contracts for both line staff probation officers as well as probation supervisors. In these contracts, we agreed to pay a portion of the cost of health care benefits, change our pension contribution and decrease the number of holidays. Now, within just weeks of signing this agreement, our officers are being asked to accept a wage freeze along with the furlough.

Given the potential strain that these furloughs, wage freezes, and potential layoffs could particularly place on the probation system, we would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you and members of your staff to find ways to avoid them. Again, we understand the need for the state to cut costs, but as noted above, these actions place an additional strain on a struggling, understaffed probation system.

If you have any questions regarding our concerns with these budget and staffing-related issues, please feel free to contact me at (732) 223-1799.

Sincerely,

George Christie  
President  
Probation Association of New Jersey

cc: Chief Justice Stuart Rabner  
Honorable Glenn Grant Adm. Director Courts  
Senate President Richard J. Codey  
Assembly Speaker Joseph J. Roberts  
Senate Budget Chairwoman Barbara Buono  
Assembly Budget Chairman Louis Greenwald