

Probation Association of New Jersey

Question #1 – Do you support legislation to transfer probation services from Judiciary to the State Parole Board.

Answer – I would support any step necessary to improve the operation and safety of the State's Parole Officers. My administration would not wait for a year for the Constitutional Amendment process to occur but would immediately work with the Chief Justice to ensure that the Judiciary has the resources necessary to make these critical improvements to our parole system and operating procedures. The Judiciary would understand that I recognize the harsh realities of the work being performed by Probation Officers across the state and that these require the commitment and support of the entire state government.

Question #2 – If approved by the voters, would you support the creation of a Bureau of Probation within the State Parole Board and transfer all probation functions to that Bureau?

Answer – If the voters approved the transfer of Probation Services to the State Parole Board, I would support the creation of a Bureau of Probation. I believe that the proposed legislation appropriately manages the transfer and protection of all employees under those conditions.

Question #3 – Do you support a change in the new policy of the Judiciary that prohibits probation officers from assisting in the apprehension and arrest of offenders, even those that they are charged with supervising. Would you support legislation to change that policy and grant police powers similar to those granted to parole officers and investigators in the Department of Corrections?

Answer – I would immediately seek to have the Judiciary reverse their policy of three years and restore the probation officers to their appropriate status which allow them to work alongside the entire law enforcement community. The change in policy was a poor decision and must be reversed to protect our probation officers, our police force and our communities.

Question #4 – Despite the increase in gang activity probation officers are not given adequate means of protecting themselves. Would you support some officers being armed when on active duty supervising offenders or making home visits?

Answer – I believe that it is absolutely essential that we provide probation officers with adequate training and all the tools necessary to allow them to perform their vital duties. This could require that under certain circumstances that specially trained officers are provided with firearms as a method of ensuring their personal safety and the appropriate performance of their responsibilities. The role of the probation officer and their special function or status in the judicial process cannot overshadow the need to adequately ensure the safety of these dedicated employees.

Question #5 – State laws prohibit probationers, parolees or individuals convicted of crimes of the fourth degree from voting. Would you support granting the right to vote while under supervision and do you believe that probation officers should be responsible to register these individuals?

Answer – I believe that an individual under supervision has forfeited their right to participate in the election process and should not be permitted to vote. I believe that the responsibility and work load of probation officers is well defined and does not include actions such as registration to vote. We need to stop increasing the workload of our probation officers so they can effectively perform duties related to their primary mission.

Question #6 Probation officers were furloughed despite other divisions of law enforcement being granted an exemption. Do you believe that probation officers should be treated as members of law enforcement and exempted from layoffs, furloughs or wage freezes?

Answer – I do believe that probation officers are a critical part of our law enforcement team and would treat them in that manner. I believe that Governor Corzine has so badly mismanaged this state and that the past eight years of mismanagement have led to New Jersey suffering significantly greater budgetary stress than any neighboring state. This mismanagement resulted in the chaos of this past budget and has set the stage for an even greater crisis next year. My record and role in preserving the safety of the citizens of this state is clear and I will not allow the financial crisis to undermine our efforts to protect our citizens. The magnitude of the crisis presented to the next governor will certainly effect the strategies undertaken to ensure that we can protect our citizens and meet our constitutional obligations.

Question #7 – At present the Judiciary does not keep records of the criminal disposition of offenders under probation services. Would you support legislation requiring maintenance of accurate data and the reporting of that data to the Legislature?

Answer – It is unacceptable that we do not maintain these records and report the results of the performance of probationers while they are under supervision. Not only should this data be collected, it is necessary that it be presented publicly so that all residents and taxpayers can know the results of our efforts. I believe that the public is entitled to a transparent state government, one that regularly and routinely accounts for its work and its results and one that can recognize when something is not achieving the desired result and is able to change its policies or procedures in order to improve.

Question #8 – The Legislature has recently considered several measures focused on rehabilitating offenders and working to address recidivism rates. Would you support measures aimed at stopping the pattern of increased criminal activity?

Answer – As I have laid out in my Bringing Back Our Cities plan, I believe that we need to reform our process to ensure that the worst offenders are required to complete their sentences and that the offenders with treatable conditions such as drug or alcohol addictions or lack of education are provided with an appropriate resource to be able to address those underlying issues. I will support efforts that significantly revise our state's bail procedures, stopping offenders from being released before the arrest report is even prepared, ensure that a sentence for a violent offence is fully served and provide non-violent drug or alcohol offenders with access to the treatment that they need to stop their downward spiral.

Question #9 – Training for Parole Officers was increased to a 24 week program, while Probation Officers only receive approximately 10 days of classroom training. Would you support increased funding for Probation Officer training?

Answer – I would absolutely support increased training and to assist the State's Probation Officers in the performance of their critical duties. It is wrong for the state to expect officers without the proper training and experience to successfully deal with the offenders and to effectively perform their duties. Ongoing training coupled with modern tools and adequate resources are all necessary to ensure that these officers can complete their mission.

Question #10- What are your suggestions on ways to improve the state's community supervision system, including the probation system?

Answer – Many of the actions and improvements outlined in these answers would serve to significantly enhance the ability of the probation officers to do their jobs and in the outcomes achieved for the probationers. I believe that our law enforcement and judicial systems need to reexamine the artificial barriers to cooperation and coordination that have been created and to return to a common sense approach to securing the safety of our communities. We must all be committed to stopping the spread of the influence of gangs across the state, in communities large and small and allow for all of the resources of the state to be focused on restoring and preserving our safety.