

Dear Colleague:

There is no question that probation and parole officers are exposed to more risk today than they were in the past. One reason is that people sentenced to probation and those released on parole are now more serious offenders-in terms of the severity of their criminal acts, prior records, and drug abuse histories.

A U.S. Department of Justice report indicated that 45 percent of all state prison inmates were either on probation or on parole when they committed the acts for which they were sent to prison. Of 162,000 recent probation violators, it was learned that over a 17 month period they committed 6,400 murders, 7,400 rapes, 10,400 assaults and 17,000 robberies while under supervision in their communities. It is also significant to note that approximately 21 percent of probation and parole violators reported that they carried firearms while on community supervision.

Clearly, probation and parole officers are charged with an enormous daily risk and they must have the ability to protect themselves at all levels of confrontation.

Unfortunately, safety standards at the state and county level for these officers are inconsistent and often insufficient to uphold officer safety and public security. Different agency missions, policies, training, equipment and officer classification result in a contrary and sometimes conflicting landscape. For our nation's probation and parole agencies to protect and serve the public efficiently, we must ensure the standardization of the many components that drive their mission.

H.R. 484, the Probation and Parole Officer Safety Task Force Act, is designed to combat this problem. This legislation:

1. Creates a Task Force within the Department of Justice to study Federal and State policies and practices as they affect the personal safety of probation and parole officers during the execution of their duties. The Task Force will recommend guidelines for the safety training of probation and parole officers, as well as the use of force and equipment standards- including whether to arm such officers.
2. Directs the Bureau of Justice Statistics to carry out comprehensive statistical reviews of the incidence and effects of violence against Federal and State probation and parole officers and submit annual results to the Attorney General.

This legislation has already been endorsed by the American Probation and Parole Association and the Federal Probation and Pretrial Officers Association. Please contact Rich Thomas in Congressman Pascrell's office at (202) 225-5751 for additional information or to cosponsor.

Sincerely,

Bill Pascrell, Jr.

Member of Congress

Curt Weldon

Member of Congress