



**Probation Association of New Jersey**  
*Serving New Jersey Since 1904*  
*An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association*  
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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE**

Dwight Covaleskie, President of PANJ

Thank you Chairman Schaer and members of this Committee for allowing me to present testimony on behalf of the Probation Association of New Jersey (PANJ) regarding issues of importance to our membership. My name is Dwight Covaleskie and I am the President of the Probation Association of New Jersey. PANJ, established over 100 years ago, represents approximately two thousand eight hundred Probation Officers and Supervisors. PANJ employs hard working men and women who have dedicated their lives to public service and have demanding jobs. We supervise men and women in the criminal system, often at times working in dangerous neighborhoods, and ensure the safety of the public by enforcing the laws and mandates of the Courts. Our priority has always been and will always be the citizens of New Jersey.

New Jersey's Probation Officers and Supervisors oversee over 120,000 adults and 20,000 juveniles. In recent years, New Jersey ranks 10<sup>th</sup>, nationally in the number of probationers under supervision. Probation Officers are on the frontlines in protecting our communities by fighting recidivism and helping offenders re-enter society as law-abiding citizens.

PANJ has played a vital role in expanding several State-wide programs, such as the Drug Court Program, Mental Health Caseloads, Domestic Violence and other specialized caseloads in supervision and throughout the Judiciary. This is due to the dedication shown by the Probation Officers and Supervisors in their professionalism, supervising these difficult and demanding caseloads.

The Probation Association of New Jersey continues to support the idea that the intention of Bail Reform was to ease the incarceration of non-violent offenders, while maintaining the public's safety. A 2009 national survey of pretrial services programs found that half of all pretrial programs initiated since 1990 were housed administratively within probation departments. As a result of this trend, the overall percentage of pretrial services programs now housed in probation departments is on the rise. Probation-based pretrial services programs have fewer staff than other programs administratively housed elsewhere. This was not done in New Jersey with Pre Trial Services. This would have been one way to attempt to control the ballooning costs to tax payers.

We are concerned that the unveiling of this reform effort has not matched the intent of this reform by this legislative body. While the statute established pretrial monitoring as a pretrial release option, the statute did not state how pretrial monitoring was to be accomplished. Presently, there is not a field work component in pretrial services monitoring. The lack of supervision places the safety of our citizens and Law Enforcement Officers at risk. We strongly applaud the Legislature for passing A-4008/SCS (2015), which requires AOC to establish a program that collects recidivism data and make reports concerning adults sentenced to a period of probation. PANJ would like the Assembly Budget Committee to consider further oversight and review on how current and future funds will be allocated

towards the implementation of Bail Reform. PANJ believes that through transparency, enforced measures of standards, and review of the metrics that will be used to evaluate this reform's effectiveness, this historic reform will ultimately succeed in New Jersey.

PANJ believes the continued and ongoing evaluation of Bail Reform, Recidivism tracking and other initiatives will be critical to the determination of the proper allocation of resources to each initiative within the Judiciary. This is significant, because with little promotional opportunity and a stagnant starting salary, it will be more difficult to attract and retain qualified Probation Officers and Supervisors. Currently, Probation Officers and Supervisors leave for State Parole, State Police, Federal Probation and other Federal, State and local law enforcement jobs, because the training, salary and benefits are better.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee for giving us the opportunity to address you today. We look forward to working with all of you closely on issues of importance not only to our organization but to the safety of citizens throughout the State of New Jersey.