



Probation Association of New Jersey

Serving New Jersey Since 1904

An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association

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April 3, 2019

PANJ Testimony to Assembly Budget Committee on Judiciary

Dwight Covaleskie, President of PANJ

Thank you Chairwoman Pintor Marin, 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 was established over 100 years ago and we represent approximately two thousand eight hundred Probation Officers and Supervisors, throughout the state. PANJ advocates, on behalf of its members; hard working men and women who have dedicated their lives to public service and have demanding jobs. Officers supervise persons sentenced to Probation in the criminal system, often at times working in dangerous neighborhoods, to 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 approximately 120,000 adults and 20,000 juveniles. In recent years, New Jersey ranks 10th 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, including the Criminal, Family and Child Support Enforcement units. This is due to the dedication shown by the Probation Officers and Supervisors in their professionalism, supervising and handling these difficult and demanding caseloads.

As the Assembly Budget Committee continues to seek additional revenue sources to fund the State, we implore the Legislature to explore options that the New Jersey Economic & Fiscal Policy Workgroup highlighted in their "Path to Progress" report, that may also help fund our pension system. Options highlighted in the report, which PANJ supports, include: transferring other assets such as Turnpike Authority funds to the pension system and requiring local governments to dedicate local assets in lieu of cash pension contributions which will help provide a continuous and steady stream of revenue.

Additionally, PANJ believes that by having municipal and county shared services, the reduced cost of government can be put back towards the workforce, help lower taxes, and help improve the overall quality of life of the people living in these communities. The merger of municipal courts with smaller caseloads, which would be determined by the New Jersey Supreme Court Committee on Municipal Court Operations, Fines, and Fees, would generate a long-term revenue stream, at an efficient pace. These changes can be accomplished at the municipal and county levels and provide more than adequate regional services. Having human resources serve larger regions would cut costs from the Judiciary, which can then be directed to the pension system for judicial employees.

By investing in our state workers in the Judiciary, PANJ members can continue to provide vital services such as job training referrals and addiction services, as we have done in Drug Court and other specialized caseloads. Therefore, PANJ would also like the Assembly Budget Committee to explore the lack of promotional opportunity available to PANJ members. PANJ negotiates our labor contracts with the Judiciary with our two bargaining units – the Case-Related Professional unit and the Professional Supervisors unit. Our Case-Related unit represents approximately 2,000 Probation Officers, while the Professional Supervisor unit represents approximately 800 members. In the past, Line Staff have been promoted based on competency, like parole employees. This is no longer the case and consequently hundreds of promotional opportunities have passed over our members. Master Probation Officer positions have not been filled in years, and since this position performs highly specialized work in all divisions, this is an increasing problem. This combined with different salary schedules not only adversely affect employee morale, but it has become increasingly difficult to retain employees.

On behalf of PANJ, I thank you Madam Chairwoman and members of this Committee for considering the unique position and hardships that my members experience, while trying to effectively monitor and protect our communities throughout the State. We look forward to working with you closely on not only issues of importance to our organization, but also the issues that overall impact the safety and wellbeing of our citizens.