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Probation Association of New Jersey

Serving New Jersey Since 1904

An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association

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Dear Editor:

When times get tough, it is often easiest to point fingers or lay blame on certain individuals or groups. Unfortunately, it seems that politicians, pundits and the public have decided to make state employees the scapegoats for the state's financial condition calling for massive lay-offs, wage freezes or furloughs. What these people do not realize are the necessary services that are performed by state employees. Nor do they realize that many jobs are performed quietly and diligently for the protection of all New Jersey residents.

As the union representing thousands of probation officers and supervisors – all of whom are state employees – it is frustrating to be stereotyped or faced with layoffs when we supervise offenders in the community. Probation officers are critical partners in community safety and service that should not be categorized as “do-nothing” state employees.

If probation officers are absent from the job, even for one furlough day a month, the work of the Judiciary would be jeopardized and vital services would be dreadfully compromised. Within the Superior Court system, critical functions handled by probation officers keep the system moving. In Family Court, officers process restraining orders for domestic violence matters, resolve family conflicts and crisis. The Criminal Division is charged with immediate and direct support to the courts for sentencing of defendants, court orders, and bail functions for dangerous criminals. The Probation Division directly supervises defendants in the community, provides court enforcement duties including child support collection.

On any given day, our probation officers ensure that offenders are reporting their whereabouts, undergoing rehabilitation efforts, intervening in family custody investigations, or paying child support or fines in the cases of “dead-beats”. We protect domestic violence victims from would-be abusers, notify law enforcement when offenders are a flight risk, perform home inspections to protect neighborhoods from hidden dangers, and make sentencing recommendations. We take on work that is not glamorous or headline-grabbing, but it keeps our communities safe and holds probationers accountable.

The old adage warns that you should not judge until you “walk a mile in my shoes.” Probation officers, as state employees, should not be stereotyped until critics have walked a mile in our shoes in the communities where we protect and serve every day.

Sincerely,

George P. Christie
President
Probation Association of New Jersey