



Probation Association of New Jersey

Serving New Jersey Since 1904

An affiliate of the American Probation and Parole Association

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Probation Officer Staffing Hits Critical Lows

There is no question that the lack of Judges in New Jersey's Court System has strained our justice system. Countless news articles have highlighted how the lack of Judges has delayed Civil trials and divorces in several counties over this past Spring and Summer. But what has flown under the radar and needs to be addressed is New Jersey's lack of Probation Officers, Supervisors and their treatment in the judicial system of our State.

Probation Officers and their first level Supervisors are a vital part of our public safety system. They supervise convicted offenders. They enforce child support orders. They write pre-sentence reports. They provide direction and guidance to victims of domestic violence as they pursue temporary and permanent restraining orders. Probation Officers and Supervisors also work in Recovery Court (formerly drug court). All of these services not only improve the quality of life for all New Jersey citizens, but also vastly improve the quality of life for those in need of those services.

Sadly, the hiring and retention of Probation Officers and Supervisors has reached a crisis level. Both Probation Officers and Supervisors are overworked. Overworked Probation Officers and Supervisors can face a range of challenges and issues that can negatively impact their work and the outcomes of the individuals they provide services and supervise. Statistics show that when caseload sizes are reduced there is an increased success rate for clients placed on Probation. New Jersey is therefore failing our Probation Officers, Supervisors and their clients as a result.

The Judiciary currently has no recruitment or retention incentive programs in place to keep our Probation Officers and Supervisors on the job. There are historic levels of staff vacancies throughout the Judiciary and that has an impact on all of our safety. Insufficient salaries and career progression make probation work less of an attractive chosen profession.

Specifically, over the years the Judiciary has been able to bypass promotional opportunities for our Probation Officer's and Supervisor's leaving them with no upward mobility in their careers. Judiciary employees, unlike the Executive Branch employees, have no step system and it takes a Probation Officer 20 plus years to reach maximum salary which currently lags well below the maximum pay for State Parole and Correctional Police Officers. Simply put, the current starting salary for a new Probation Officer or Supervisor barely covers the cost to pay rent or a mortgage and raise a family in New Jersey.

This problem will not go away without an immediate influx of new employees, an increase in starting salaries, promotional opportunities, a retention strategy for Officers and Supervisors, and an adequate staffing model that addresses the increase in filings in criminal pre-indictment and domestic violence cases.

New Jersey needs Judges but the Judges can't do their jobs without professional Probation Officers and Supervisors in their roles. The time has come for the Administrative Office of the Courts to support Probation Officer and Supervisor staffing and pay as loudly as they do to hire Judges.

By Dwight Covalleskie

Mr. Covalleskie is the President of the Probation Association of NJ (PANJ). PANJ is a Professional Union made up of approximately 2,600 public employees in Wall, NJ.