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February 27, 2006

The Honourable Dwight Duncan
Minister of Finance
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Minister Duncan:

Re: Ontario Budget 2006

The Probation Officers Association of Ontario represents the professional interests of the Province's Probation Officers. We have advocated on behalf of the profession for the past fifty-four years in areas such as policy, legislation, workload, technology, professional development, public education, and service delivery.

Given the current workload issues and the direct correlation to our ability to enhance the safety of Ontario's communities, we are hopeful that the hiring of the remaining Probation Officers promised during the Liberal election campaign will be announced. In addition, we hope that the Probation Officers who have been hired under this promise will be converted to full-time from the current contracts. Such a budget announcement would be consistent with the government's public statements regarding the guns and gangs initiative, at risk youth, high-risk offenders, domestic violence, child pornography issues, protecting children and preventing crime.

Information regarding the need for the additional hires, as well as some potential cost-savings is enclosed. The Ministry references in this submission pertain to the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (for adult offenders) and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (for young persons). Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Donald Larman
President

**Submission to
The Government of Ontario
Concerning the 2006 Provincial Budget
by
The Probation Officers Association of Ontario
February 27, 2006**

During the Liberal election campaign, 100 more Probation Officers were promised in light of the party's commitment to community safety issues. There has been repeated recognition by frontline staff, the Provincial Auditor, our Association, and the Ministry, of existing workload pressures and the resultant negative impact on our ability to protect the public from offenders under our supervision. Inadequate resourcing of our profession has a direct impact on the timeliness of enforcement, obtaining critical collateral information, completing comprehensive assessments, and making necessary referrals to treatment and counselling services. Maintaining on-going contact with criminal justice partners, victims, and others integral to community supervision of offenders are critical and also time-sensitive. Without appropriate resources in place, our service is unable to meet its stated objectives, and the risk to Ontario's communities is increased.

There is no denying the fact that the risk level and complexity of offenders under provincial community supervision has increased in recent years. Domestic violence, sexual offenders, conditional sentencing and youth legislation, de-institutionalisation of the mentally ill, child pornography and other Internet-related offences, homelessness, gangs, weapon use, and overall sentencing trends have contributed to the current situation.

Specifically, within the past year alone, the Ontario government has recognized the increase in generalized street violence and the proliferation of handguns in the Province. In response, the Ontario Government has recently established the Guns and Gangs Provincial Operations Centre. The Centre will bring together experts such as Toronto and GTA police services, OPP, RCMP, Provincial and Federal Crowns, Victim Services and Probation and Parole Officers. This Centre will require the staffing of at least 12 Probation and Parole Officers by April 1, 2006. Such a Centre would assist in addressing specific issues around guns and gangs, spending more time focusing on gathering intelligence and sharing with the police which would inevitably assist with enforcement and crime prevention.

Recently the Ontario government announced the Youth Challenge Fund and the Youth Opportunity Strategy. It appears as if funding has been dedicated to neighbourhood programs in addition to police and prosecutors to work with neighbourhoods in the fight against guns and gangs and educate youths in the prevention of further involvement. Probation Officers are currently supervising youths in these identified areas and will continue to do so and rely upon these

programs to assist in the rehabilitation of these youths. There does not appear to be any funding directly related to the Youth Justice field, specifically Probation Officers to assist with the supervision of these youths. Probation Officers are key to all linkages within our community and neighbourhoods.

In light of workload pressures, the risks that offenders under our supervision pose to Ontario's communities and the complex situations we are increasingly faced with, it would be unwise of the Ontario government not to follow-through on this election commitment in a timely manner. Hiring the remaining 100 Probation Officers promised would have a positive impact on our ability to protect Ontario's communities.

The other area requiring investment in our profession is staff training. Given the issues noted above, on-going professional development is critical to effective service delivery. Probation Officers have been inundated with changes in legislation, policy, technology, service delivery and offender complexity in recent years. The Ministry, through its own evaluation mechanisms, is able to demonstrate how well trained staff is more effectively able to achieve desired results in this profession and consequently this is a worthwhile investment.

The greatest cost-savings achieved by having adequate staffing levels and funding for training, is a reduction in recidivism. Each time an offender re-offends, the resultant costs include police response, court proceedings, legal fees for defence, and the sentence which may include incarceration and/or community supervision with counselling or treatment resources. In addition to this are all the costs associated with victimization including victim services, health costs resulting from personal injury offences, and potential counselling / treatment required. Then there are costs associated with the long-term impact of being victimized in terms of health, loss of employment, social adjustment and resource provision. By managing offenders at a level commensurate with their assessed risk, and consistently intervening in a timely manner, recidivism can be reduced and these costs would consequently decrease.

While we are demonstrating the importance of hiring additional Officers and providing adequate training to Probation Officers, we also have suggestions around cost-savings.

The Ministries could realize cost-savings through enhanced contract compliance measures. There are numerous transfer-payment agreements between the Ministries and agencies that provide services to offenders. Concerns have been expressed over the years that there is a lack of accountability regarding the management of such contracts, and further the fact that some programs are providing services, which are directly provided by Probation Officers in different locations.

Particularly since the consolidation of Phase I and II Probation into the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, it is apparent that increased accountability is needed in the management of such contracts. For example, it is alarming to realize that there are numerous transfer-payment contracts in existence to provide a service, Extra-Judicial Sanctions (EJS), which is provided directly by Probation Officers in many locations. If all such agreements were terminated and this one service (EJS) was directly operated, the cost-savings could be re-invested into community programming which is lacking, such as children's mental health. The example of Extra-Judicial Sanctions is just one demonstration of how these transfer-payment agreements require further examination.

In addition, the Ministries should evaluate programs they are funding, rather than allowing the service provider to evaluate its own program and provide results. This would increase accountability and confidence in the process. Finally, any funding provided by the federal government for justice initiatives, such as Youth Justice pilots, should be transferred directly to the province for allocation. Otherwise, the result is the current situation in which numerous programs are operating, funded by either the province or federal government, with the result being potential duplication and a lack of accountability with these funds. Having the Ontario Ministries assess programming needs and allocate funding directly would increase efficiency and accountability, as well as funding for critical services.

Consistent with the government's plan to have the Guns and Gang Provincial Operations Centre (adult clients) co-located with the police, such plans will assist the static security costs and also result in enhanced working relationships with our policing partners. Where possible, managing at-risk offenders in a collaborative manner with policing services would increase the response time, and effectiveness of our services. Co-location will benefit both parties in terms of working relationships and security measures for staff and the community. It is imperative that appropriate interventions and programs be developed to assist Probation Officers (youth) to ensure services to all youth commence at the earliest stages of their lives.

Another area that requires further collaboration to reduce recidivism is the issue of mentally ill offenders under community supervision. The fact that services have been introduced to serve such individuals in the community, such as ACT (Assertive Community Treatment) Teams is positive. However, despite recent announcements regarding increased funding, there is no indication that such services will be mandated to work with correctional clients. The current dilemma facing our service is the fact that publicly funded treatment providers can decline service to the offenders who need it the most – those who pose a significant risk to the public and require a high level of intervention. If the mandate of these

services was amended such that they were obligated to provide mental health services to those under community supervision, we would be able to more effectively manage these offenders, and provide timely clinical intervention to avoid deteriorating mental health.

In the current system, high-risk mentally ill offenders who are denied service pose an increased risk to the community. Probation Officers are left to supervise such offenders without adequate clinical supports. When such an offender recidivates, not only are all the resultant costs incurred, but a new victim is created where one could have been prevented. At the same time, the mentally ill offender is again processed through the criminal justice system, when provision of appropriate mental health treatment may have prevented this. We strongly recommended that the Ministry of Health work collaboratively with the Ministries responsible for Probation Services so that agreements can be developed around the mandatory provision of treatment to mentally ill offenders under community supervision.

In closing, we strongly encourage the government to hire the remaining 100 Probation Officers promised, and provide adequate training funds for our front-line professionals. We have suggested cost-savings in the areas of increased accountability for management of transfer-payment contracts, co-locating at-risk offender, offices with the police where possible, and providing necessary services to mentally ill offenders to reduce re-offending.

The reduction in recidivism achieved through timely and effective offender supervision will result in cost-savings for the province, as well as a decrease in victimization.