

## PRESENTATION TO MINISTRY OF FINANCE

### Background:

The Ontario government directly employs Probation Officers and Probation and Parole Officers in the Ministry of Community and Social Services and Ministry of Correctional Services respectively. There are over 600 Probation/Parole Officers employed by Ministry of Correctional Services, supervising offenders age 16 and over. On any given day, these officers supervise over 60,000 offenders in the community. The average caseload in the province of Ontario is 117 per officer, which is approximately 70% higher than the national average of 70 per officer.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has approximately 200 Probation Officers who supervise young people who commit offences between the ages of twelve and fifteen (known as Phase 1). On any given day, there are between 9,000 and 10,000 young offenders in the Phase 1 system, with over 95% being under community supervision. Historically, given expectations of the Child and Family Services Act and the importance of early intervention, it has been recognized that caseloads for Phase 1 officers should be lower. In fact, consultants commissioned by the government over a decade ago recommended that appropriate caseloads for these officers should be in the range of 30 per officer. In many areas of the province, caseloads are double that number.

Probation Officers within both Ministries play a crucial role in public safety and offender rehabilitation. The Probation Officer is the designated case manager for the offender population. As research has demonstrated, Probation Officers are the practitioners best able to predict recidivism. Our profession demands that the Probation Officer remain informed of the latest research and intervention methods, which translates into improved public safety. Given the tremendous workloads that exist in community corrections, it is essential that the front-line professional is able to utilize the most effective methods in a limited time period. In addition to working with offenders, Probation Officers intervene frequently with victims, particularly in cases involving domestic violence and sexual offences. In order to prevent re-victimization, the Probation Officer provides counselling and education services to known victims to assist them in making informed decisions. Simultaneously, we assess level of offender risk using collateral information from the victim.

Probation Officers play a key role in public education. Many officers perform outreach functions through public speaking engagements at schools, community functions, and with the media. Through these venues, the Probation Officer increases public awareness of issues related to public safety, crime prevention, and methods for addressing the underlying causes of crime.

Probation Officers and Probation/Parole Officers perform the following duties:

- supervision of offenders in the community on probation, parole, conditional sentence and conditional supervision orders;

- ensuring compliance with orders such as restitution and community service;
- preparation of Pre-Sentence, Pre-disposition, and Pre-Parole Reports;
- broker appropriate counselling and treatment services, as well as life skills and vocational services;
- provide case management of custodial dispositions, acting as the essential link between the community and institutions;
- ongoing risk assessment and evaluation
- victim liaison including education, referrals, and advocacy;
- liaison with police, judiciary, schools, and community partners;
- enforcement of probation, conditional sentence and conditional supervision orders and parole certificates.

## Environmental Scan

The current government has positioned itself as being "tough on crime". It has advocated for a law-and-order agenda and in order to achieve this goal, has hired 1,000 police officers, additional crown attorneys and expanded domestic violence courts. These initiatives have had and will continue to have a profound impact on our profession.

Concurrently, we have experienced a dramatic increase in the complexity of cases facing the front-line officer. Increasingly we are faced with a more volatile and complex offender population including sex offenders, mentally ill offenders, domestic violence, dual disordered, homeless, and weapons-related cases. In essence, probation has become the dumping ground for the Province's most troubled and dangerous individuals.

Given the complex client population and caseload numbers, community corrections is in a state of crisis. The system is at a breaking point. Recent tragic events in Toronto demonstrate the risk level of some of our clients, for example, the Charlene Minkowski and Constable Hancox cases. While we refuse to sensationalize, one must be aware that, given the current supervision levels, the community is at risk. The recent Supreme Court decisions regarding Conditional Sentences stipulated that there must be appropriate resources to ensure an adequate level of supervision. The recent survey of Ontario judges revealed their reluctance to use this type of supervision due to the lack of officers. This lack of confidence in the system that supervises 70,000 offenders on a daily basis must be addressed.

## Recommendations:

Ministry documents indicate the cost of one Probation Officer including benefits is \$64,000 per year. Given current caseload sizes, that amounts to approximately \$5 per day to supervise one offender – very inexpensive indeed. POAO acknowledges that the Ministry of Correctional Services is in the process of implementing the Probation & Parole Service Delivery Model. We are cognizant that some of the changes within this model may have a limited impact on workload. We do not concur with the Ministry's position that technology will affect the current crisis. In fact enhanced technology should increase the workload vis-à-vis enforcement and supervision.

Given current realities within the Ministry of Correctional Services, it would be necessary to hire an additional 250 officers to reach the national caseload average of 70 offenders per officer. This would cost \$16,000,000 per year. We recognize that, with the climate of fiscal restraint within the government, this is not likely to occur. We would recommend a more balanced approach including possible impacts of the new service delivery model; therefore, it is our position that 100 additional Probation/Parole Officers need to be hired at a cost of \$6.4 million per annum. Additionally, within the Ministry of Community and Social Services, 25 additional officers are needed at a cost of \$1.6 million. These initiatives would give a clear signal that the government truly stands behind its commitment to public safety.

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POAO President

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