

Good afternoon, Chairman Lawlor, Chairman McDonald and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Tonia McCown and I am a parole officer and an official of Local 1565 of Council 4 AFSCME, representing parole and correctional employees. Thank you for holding this hearing. Our parole officers appreciate the concern that Governor Rell, Representative Lawlor and many other policy makers have shown regarding the parole board and improving parole. As a frontline parole officer, I can tell you two things that would help our parole officers immediately would be adding more staff and more training.

Often there is a tendency to look at caseload numbers alone as a measure of how well-staffed parole is. Since the Cheshire murders, the specific work for each parole case has increased. While greater scrutiny of each parolee is a fine idea, more parole officers are needed to accomplish this work. We ask that you consider the workload and the quality of work that goes into effectively supervising an offender. We ask that you consider the amount of work and time needed to prepare the package that influences an offender's eligibility, as well as the quantity of overall work assigned to an officer. I do not come before you today with a specific request for how many more officers should be added. However, our union would be happy to try and come up with such a number in time for the start of the legislative session (February 6), or work with the administration and legislature in determining such a number.

We also request more clerical staff to assist the parole board. Right now, parole officers are often performing clerical duties. This seems to be a more costly way to handle answering the phones, filing and processing paperwork, than hiring clerical staff. It would also allow parole officers more time to directly supervise parolees. We ask that any clerical hires be state employees and not temps. Due to the sensitive nature of the work, we think it warrants being put in the hands of state employee clericals, rather than contract workers.

We believe that cross training parole officers for both case work and hearing work will allow for the better use of parole officers by each division (Field/Community Services as well as the Board of Pardons and Parole). It will also give parole officers a more complete sense of how the entire parole system works and enhance our efforts to make the system more effective.

We as parole officers take pride in the service that we provide to our state's citizens. The hard work and diligence of parole officers is evidenced in the March 1, 2007 Office of Policy and Management report that shows that a parolee is almost twice as likely to avoid reconviction than is an offender who has completed his entire prison sentence. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

THE INFLUENCE OF PROBATION SUPERVISION FOLLOWING PRISON

Conclusion: Inmates with probation supervision after completing their prison sentence have lower conviction rates than inmates leaving prison without community supervision.

It is common practice in Connecticut for judges to sentence convicted offenders to serve a prison term and once this prison term is completed, the offender is sentenced to serve a term of probation. This practice is commonly referred to as a split-sentence and guarantees that these offenders will have some type of community supervision following their release from prison.

The final analysis looked at the effect of split sentence probation on reconviction rates. For this analysis, only inmates who had completed their sentence were included because they were the only group being supervised by probation officers following their release from prison (parolees and transitional supervision inmates were excluded). Over one-third of all inmates released at the end of their sentence had to serve a term of probation to follow (36%).

For the three types of end of sentence inmates, the reconviction rates were significantly lower for split sentence probationers than inmates leaving prison without a probation sentence to follow. Overall, the reconviction rate was 14% higher for inmates who were released from prison following the completion of their sentence who did not have a term of probation to follow (46% to 32%).

Reconviction Rates for Split Sentenced Probationers by Type of Prison Release

	Number	Release from Prison	Release from Parole	Release from Transitional Supervision	Overall Averages
Post-Prison Probation	1,878	37%	21%	29%	32%
No Probation after leaving DOC custody	3,366	52%	32%	43%	46%
Overall Averages		47%	27%	37%	42%