

Testimony re: funding for county probation and parole services
Prepared by Everett A. Gillison, Esq., Deputy Mayor for Public Safety
City of Philadelphia
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Good morning. My name is Everett A. Gillison, and I am the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety for the City of Philadelphia. I thank the members of the Judiciary Committee and Senator Kitchen for the opportunity to present testimony on the issues surrounding funding of county probation and parole services. I have had an opportunity to review the 2000 study of costs and services in Pennsylvania's county adult probation system by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee.

Under the Nutter Administration, as Deputy Mayor for Public Safety, I have the responsibility to coordinate all of the public safety agencies in the City of Philadelphia. This includes: police, fire, prisons and emergency management. In addition, my office works closely with the Courts, Probation & Parole, the District Attorney and the Public Defender. As you know, the Nutter Administration is very aggressive and strategic in our crime fighting efforts. And our strategy has been effective in reducing violent crime rates. However, we are also very aware that this success is placing a heavier burden on the prison system as well as the probation and parole agencies.

Probation and Parole are key elements of our criminal justice system. According to the 200 LBFC report, nearly 70% of Pennsylvania's entire offender population is on probation. The numbers of offenders in the county adult probation system far exceeds the system's capacity. We in the City acknowledge the many challenges that face county adult and probation officers as they attempt to do their jobs. Among those challenges are large caseloads which lead to ineffective monitoring. We have to provide our probation and parole officers with the resources they need to effectively carry out their duties.

As you know, Philadelphia – as both a city and a county – must fund many municipal and county services from the same tax base. No other city in Pennsylvania has this dual role. Our local resources cannot adequately fund the extensive array of programs needed to successfully reduce crime. We need the State to be our partner in this effort, and urge that you increase funding for county probation and parole departments

Under-funding of Adult Probation and Parole services has been a long-term problem. The State Grant-in-Aid (GIA) funding has not been adequate to meet the 80% funding percentage in any year since the Pennsylvania legislature added the provision in 1987. Additionally, funding for the GIA program has not kept pace with the increases in caseload and workload demands occurring in our county and throughout the Commonwealth. The under-funding of probation and parole has left salary levels low compared to comparable job sectors. Low salaries and high turn-over are significant challenges that impact our ability to keep these departments staffed.

Because of the importance of probation and parole services and the challenges this system faces, the City is greatly encouraged that this Committee is holding this hearing and is seriously reviewing the recommendations of the 2000 LBFC Report. The City of Philadelphia strongly urges the General Assembly to: (a) conduct a special review of the GIA funding provisions; (b) consider granting the Board of Probation and Parole a separate budget hearing to provide a forum for a full discussion of the funding needs of county adult probation; (c) evaluate recommendations related to establishing reasonable caseloads and salary levels for county adult probation personnel; (d) allow counties to retain all offender supervision fees; and (e) statutorily add a representative of the County Chief Probation Officers Association to the Advisory Committee on Probation.

Once again, I thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony into the record. I look forward to continuing to work with you on this important issue to Philadelphia and to all counties across the Commonwealth.