



September 20, 2021

To: Chairman Lisa Baker and Democratic Chair Steven Santarsiero

Re: Community Supervision Reforms

On behalf of the Justice Action Network, the nation's largest organization supporting effective, data-driven criminal justice policies, I write to you today in support of legislation to improve the effectiveness of community supervision policies in Pennsylvania. Specifically, we support efforts by this Committee to safely reduce lengthy probation terms and the use of incarceration to respond to technical violations. These policies would dramatically improve successful outcomes for those on probation in Pennsylvania by ensuring both accountability and individualized supervision and case planning.

Overly lengthy probation terms require state and local governments to spend time and resources in inefficient ways and can drive high caseloads, reducing the effectiveness of supervision across the state. Other states have been able to reduce the length of supervision terms without compromising public safety, resulting in a better use of taxpayer resources and more successful outcomes for those on probation. This committee should consider legislation to take that same approach in Pennsylvania by providing a mechanism to review and terminate terms for felony probation after five years, and for misdemeanor probation after three years, as well as policies to incentivize compliance with the terms and conditions of probation supervision using early probation review options.

We also urge this committee to consider legislation to reduce the use of incarceration for technical violations. Technical violations are those probation violations that do not rise to the level of a new offense, and require individualized sanctions to correct the underlying issues. Incarceration for a technical violation is not only an expensive option, but largely ineffective, and can erase any rehabilitative gains made while on community supervision. Limiting incarceration and instead relying on a variety of sanctions and corrective options can provide individualized and swift responses to minor violations, aiding in successful supervision and rehabilitation.

States across the country, from Louisiana to Minnesota, have taken similar steps to these proposed policies in Pennsylvania in reforming community supervision policies. We commend the efforts of you, Senator Lisa Baker, along with your colleagues Senator Anthony Williams and Senator Camera Bartolotta, to author these important policies, and urge approval of legislation in accordance with these policies by your colleagues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JB", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jeanette Bottler

Deputy Director, Justice Action Network