

February 15, 2012

Senate Judicial Committee
Alaska Legislature

Re: S195

As a Probation/Parole Officer (PO) for the State of Alaska for over sixteen years and in three different offices around the state, I have been assigned to different units during that time and am currently assigned to the sex offender (SO) unit in Anchorage. I keep in mind the goal of protecting the community while supervising felony offenders.

In general, a PO monitors an offender for compliance with conditions set forth by the Superior Court or the Alaska Board of Parole. That means meeting with an offender at least monthly, sometimes twice monthly and a few individuals warrant weekly visits. All contacts require documentation. Contacts are not limited to the office. SOPOs are required to conduct home visits and engage in other collateral contacts such as with employers, family members, neighbors, landlords, and occasionally contact a victim or the parent of a minor victim. During a home visit of a sex offender today, PO cannot simply look for a pile of glossy magazines in the corner of a room or under a piece of furniture. In light of technological advances for example, in order to search for pornography, a PO must search a residence for computers, laptops, thumb drives, CDs, additional hard drives and other devices that have internet connectivity such as smart phones, tablets, X boxes and play stations. We are also expected to monitor compliance with the sex offender registry, monitor the use of email addresses as well as prohibited social networking sites and aliases etc. SOPOs are also expected sit in on treatment groups, attend staffing meetings, communicate possibly multiple times in one month with a treatment provider and prepare various forms utilized during the course of a treatment period. In addition, we write violation documents and reports as well as attend court and parole hearings. Some offenders warrant extensive time and effort with referrals at least initially to get started down the path of rehabilitation or to see if they will reject the rehabilitative offerings.

I appreciate your consideration of legislation limiting our caseload size, which will allow POs to more effectively supervise felony offenders, which will enhance protection of the public and support rehabilitation.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Bennett", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Jo Bennett
Probation/Parole Officer II
Anchorage, Alaska