



Representative Chris Tuck

House Minority Leader

Alaska State Legislature

District 23 - Representing Dimond Estates, Foxridge, Taku,
Campbell, Northwood and Windemere

Sponsor Statement

House Bill 22

Probation and Parole Officer Caseload

In Alaska, two-thirds of offenders return to prison within three years. Legislators and communities have been dedicated to reducing the high rate of recidivism, but we have missed the important piece of supporting our probation officers. Probation and parole officers provide key services that can help recently-released offenders re-enter society smoothly and reduce recidivism. However, many probation officers are seeing an increase in caseloads which diminishes the amount of time spent with each individual.

According to a study by The PEW Center on the States, success rates among offenders are not high. More than 40% of probationers and more than half of parolees do not complete their supervision terms successfully. In fact, parole violations account for almost 35% of admissions in state prisons, and nearly half of local jail inmates were on probation or parole when they were arrested.

In recent years, the number of duties for probation officers has grown to include the taking of DNA samples, ensuring the offender's compliance with the Sex Offender Registry and conducting home visits and address confirmation checks. Corrections populations have also experienced tremendous growth for the past two decades. In an attempt to alleviate jail and prison crowding, probation caseloads are being populated with offenders that potentially pose greater community safety threats. These offenders may be gang members, sex offenders, or domestic violence offenders, and require more officer time to provide adequate supervision, treatment, and enforcement of conditions in order to effectively modify their behavior.

A number of studies have examined practices of probation officers and have demonstrated that medium and high-risk offenders garner the most benefit from intensive correctional interventions. Pro-social modeling and reinforcement, problem solving, and cognitive techniques are core skills for reducing recidivism in probation supervision. If probation officers are spending less time with each individual due to high caseloads, their ability to help offenders develop these skills is severely hampered.

House Bill 22 will limit the number of cases for each probation officer to 60. By passing this bill, Alaska will join 11 other states that limit probation officer caseloads to increase public safety and assist offenders with successful re-entry into society.