



## Probation officers play key role in justice system

Written by

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The American Probation and Parole Association has declared July 17-23 as a week of recognition for the work done by probation and parole officers providing supervision to offenders in the community. And for very good reason: There are more than 120,000 people on probation alone in New York. This number is more than the combined total of parolees and individuals incarcerated in the prison system. Probation is the largest alternative-to-incarceration program available to the courts and provides a crucial service in the justice system.

In Tompkins County, the Department of Probation and Community Justice is responsible for the oversight of approximately 750 individuals who are on some form of court-ordered supervision. These include youth and adults in the family court system and adults who have been convicted of misdemeanor or felony offenses in the criminal courts.

Probation officers are agents of the court and are responsible for ensuring that court-ordered conditions are met. To do this, probation officers provide direction,

guidance and mentoring in face-to-face supervision appointments. We address ambivalence, encourage change, reinforce positive behavior and confront behavior that is not conducive to a successful probation outcome.

Probation officers hold offenders accountable by ensuring that financial restitution is being paid to victims and community service is completed. We are in communication with family members, employers, schools and treatment providers to assess compliance. We perform school visits to our youth and unannounced home visits after hours and on weekends to confirm compliance with probation conditions.

Probation officers investigate and approve housing for sex offenders and verify addresses quarterly to ensure compliance with the sex offender registry.

We perform bar checks to make sure our DWI population is not drinking or driving without a license, or putting the community

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in danger by doing both. We monitor compliance with ignition interlock systems, conduct urine testing to ascertain drug use, take breath samples to determine alcohol use and install ankle bracelets that monitor alcohol use 24 hours a day.

We track and restrict an offender's movements in the community using electronic monitoring bracelets and monitor an offender's Internet use through software. We collect DNA samples for the state database.

Probation officers continually assess the risk to community safety during the course of providing supervision. While guided by our belief that all offenders have the potential to make positive changes, our responsibility is to respond to violations that put the public at risk by seeking court intervention and warrants for arrest if necessary.

Probation is a key component of the juvenile and adult justice systems, and they make a difference in our community. Everyone should recognize the work that probation officers do every day to keep our community safe while promoting offender accountability and change.

**Buechel is probation director for Tompkins County.**

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