

News Release



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Judiciary Celebrates Probation and Pretrial Services Week

The New Jersey Judiciary is recognizing Probation and Pretrial Services Week by celebrating the work of professionals whose efforts to rehabilitate adult and juvenile offenders also protect the safety of the community.

The theme of the celebration, which runs July 19-25, is “Restoring Trust, Creating Hope.”

“Even in the face of a health crisis that makes contact difficult, our officers have stayed connected to their clients through a greater use of technology in order to make positive changes,” said Judge Glenn A. Grant, acting administrative director of the courts. “We have heard countless stories about the creative efforts of probation officers as they help individuals in their return to society.”

The Judiciary’s more than 1,900 probation officers perform a number of vital roles, including supervising adult and juvenile offenders and ensuring compliance with court-ordered obligations. Those obligations can include finding and maintaining a job, performing community service, paying fines and restitutions, attending school and substance abuse treatment programs, and adhering to curfews.

In Fiscal Year 2019, probation officers served 93,380 clients. They supervised 49,485 adults and 3,735 juveniles. They conducted 26,405 inspections and 74,780 visits to clients’ homes. Probation clients performed 603,110 hours of community service.

Rashad Shabaka-Burns, director of Probation Services, said the work of probation officers has become even more meaningful during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“In recognition of Probation and Pretrial Services Week, we take this opportunity to celebrate the work of our community supervision and child support staff. Traditionally, their work presents many challenges, but this year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have been especially challenged to adapt to an ever-changing situation,” Shabaka-Burns said. “Throughout this crisis, our officers continue to provide services to our clients while balancing community supervision, child support services and public health concerns.”

He said probation division staff, working with the criminal division, an outpatient treatment program and an inpatient facility, were able to place a client who tested positive for fentanyl multiple times at his outpatient treatment program into an inpatient treatment program within two days.

“This was an incredibly quick turnaround time for a situation that usually would have taken a couple of weeks under normal circumstances. It was a remarkable achievement under the current circumstances,” he said.

He noted the creativity of the officers to keep their clients on track during the pandemic. One officer, he said, texts inspirational quotes to clients to help them stay positive. It has been so well received that now some clients are suggesting quotes for her to send, he said.

Other officers have convinced clients with bench warrants to surrender to authorities in order to receive the services they need. They have held conversations with clients about COVID-19 to help allay their fears and keep them in treatment. They have checked in with clients to let them know they’re not alone during this health crisis.

Jennifer Perez, director of Trial Court Services, said the work of pretrial services staff has been instrumental during this time. The office of pretrial services was created in 2017 to support the operation of Criminal Justice Reform. Its staff of more than 300 pretrial services officers and supervisors keep in contact with defendants awaiting trial in their community rather than in jail. They provide information on local services, check in with defendants regularly, and remind them of upcoming court dates and the requirements to follow during their pretrial release.

Pretrial services, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, conducts public safety assessments and monitors defendants who are released on conditions imposed by the court. If not for their efforts, more defendants who are presumed innocent would await their trial date in jail with potential exposure to health risks during the pandemic.

In 2019, pretrial services staff maintained contact with more than 40,000 defendants on pretrial monitoring.

“Four years into Criminal Justice Reform, our pretrial services staff continues to serve as the backbone of a system that addresses defendants based on risk rather than on their ability to pay bail,” Perez said. “In the early stages of the current pandemic, pretrial services had to quickly move to a new model of remote reporting statewide. They did so while maintaining contacts with the defendants they monitor, allowing those defendants to continue to engage in work or care for family. We appreciate their daily efforts toward creating a fairer criminal justice system.”

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