



Pima County Probation Officer Association

May 13, 2014

The Honorable Sharon Bronson, Chair
Pima County Board of Supervisors
130 West Congress Street, Eleventh Floor
Tucson, Arizona 85701

Dear Supervisor Bronson:

Probation is the act of suspending the sentence of a juvenile or adult offender facing adjudication for a criminal offense and granting a period of community supervision where the probationer agrees to complete specifically ordered conditions instead of being placed in custody. Since 1956, Pima County has supported Juvenile and Adult Probation Departments to provide Juvenile, Lower Courts, and Superior Court judges with evaluations and assessments of offender risk and monitoring compliance, if granted community supervision. Arizona has an epidemic of incarceration as the prison population has increased tenfold in the past 30 years, leading to exploding incarceration costs that strain local and state budgets. Community supervision protects public safety while allowing probationers to remain employed, obtain treatment, and repay their victims.

Pima County currently employs over 400 commissioned juvenile and adult probation and surveillance officers, unit supervisors, and juvenile detention officers. They have a unique role in the criminal justice system, as they are trained to motivate defendants to change while assuring community safety. Classified as peace officers by Arizona law, they are authorized to arrest probationers for probation violations and locate absconders and fugitives. Their arrest powers allow other local and county law enforcement personnel to remain on patrol to protect the community. Although they are not required to carry weapons, about 75% of adult and juvenile probation and surveillance officers choose to be armed and are required to complete extensive and continuing training and qualification requirements similar to law enforcement officers. They also receive extensive training in defensive tactics.

A high number of offenders successfully complete their period of supervision. Juvenile and adult probation officers have a long record of accomplishments including lowering revocation and detention rates, collection of millions of dollars in reimbursement, restitution, fines, fees, and surcharges. However, a small number refuse to change, placing the community and the officers at risk. Juvenile officers face additional challenges. Although minors are the most likely to change, they are frequently under the influence of anti-social peers and/or family members who attempt to thwart our efforts. They are also more impulsive.

CLERK'S NOTE:
COPY TO SUPERVISORS
COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

DATE 5/14/14 BT

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Although several officers are injured every year in the course of their duties, no Pima County probation officer has yet been killed in the line of duty. However, the names of nine probation officers are listed on the National Law Enforcement Memorial in Washington, D.C. and a Mojave County officer was shot in the line of duty late last year.

Often called the "Silent Shield," the general public is often unaware of our officer's presence in their neighborhoods, the risks they face, or of their participation in joint operations with local, state, and federal law enforcement officers and task forces, including the coordinated gang enforcement and fugitive units. In January 2014, Pima County Adult Probation officers assigned to the Eastside satellite office confiscated 13 ounces of high quality methamphetamine during a cursory search of a probationer recently placed under supervision. They worked with the Counter Narcotics Alliance leading to a new indictment in Pima County Superior Court. Although this was the largest recent seizure, many other officers routinely recover smaller amounts of drugs and many illegal weapons. Over the past year, juvenile and adult officers have seized over 400 weapons, including guns, knives, and brass knuckles. They have also confiscated body armor, some stolen from other law enforcement and peace officers. A Power Point showing photographs of some of this contraband has been emailed to your office and photographs are included with this letter.

Beginning in 2007, Pima County has endured an economic downturn that seriously impacted the community as a whole. As a result, compensation rates for commissioned juvenile and adult officers and supervisors have lagged behind other Arizona departments. Although Pima County is the second largest county, a 2012 survey by the Arizona Chief Probation Chiefs Association ranked Pima County 12th of the 15 Arizona counties. Recognizing this fact, the Pima County Superior Court Management Team unsuccessfully attempted to remedy this problem last year.

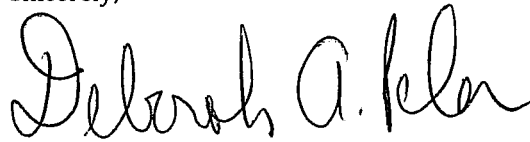
Over the past year, the failure to address the problem has caused increased attrition and turnover that has exacerbated training costs and increased wage compression. The Supplemental Budget Request submitted to you on March 28, 2014 more fully documents the extent of the problems and the proposed solution. Of greatest concern is the shocking, dangerous, and unacceptable devaluation of the contributions to the community of our commissioned officers in both departments whose duties are classified under Salary Grade 61. Salary surveys conducted by the Court and the County Manager's office have documented double digit market lags. As president of the Pima County Probation Officer's Association, I am writing to support the Court's efforts to correct this situation.

Success in this profession requires good judgment, a high level of discretion, considerable skill and knowledge of interview techniques, behavioral health, addiction, and counseling and the ability to work independently, and with people of varying educational and social background. Initial training costs are high, but additional training and experience are needed to complete their education. The current level of attrition, turnover, and wage compression constitutes a risk to community safety and has the potential of increasing expenditures for incarceration and other related social spending, should more probationers be placed in custody. The failure to address salary and wage compression problems has led to the loss of numerous officers to Pinal, Maricopa, and Yuma counties. They also hurt recruitment efforts, as well as lower morale and willingness to promote within the department. These conditions are unacceptable in any organization, be it public or private.

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Recognizing the important role the judiciary plays as a co-equal partner in assuring public safety with the executive and legislative branch, Arizona law requires the sharing of the responsibility for funding the courts between state and county governments. County boards are required to set salary ranges at the recommendation of the Chief Presiding Judge. This board has it within its power to act. I understand the difficult decisions you must make, but wish to point out that any increases will be partially mitigated by state funding sources. Every budget document is essentially a value statement. On behalf of over 400 commissioned officers in Pima County, and the people of Pima County, please continue to support the continued efficient and cost-effective management of the criminal justice system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Deborah A. Pela". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Deborah" being larger and more prominent than the last name "Pela".

Deborah A. Pela, President
Pima County Probation Officer's Association

cc: Supervisor Ally Miller
Supervisor Ramon Valadez
Supervisor Ray Carroll
Supervisor Richard Elias
County Manager Chuck Hucklebarry
The Honorable Sarah R. Simmons,
The Honorable Karen S. Adam,
The Honorable Richard Fields
Mr. Kent Batty, Court Administrator
Chief Adult Probation Officer David Sanders
Chief Juvenile Probation Officer John Skow
Enclosures



Weapons confiscated by Adult Probation officers over the past year



Firearms confiscated by Pima County Adult Probation Department over the past year



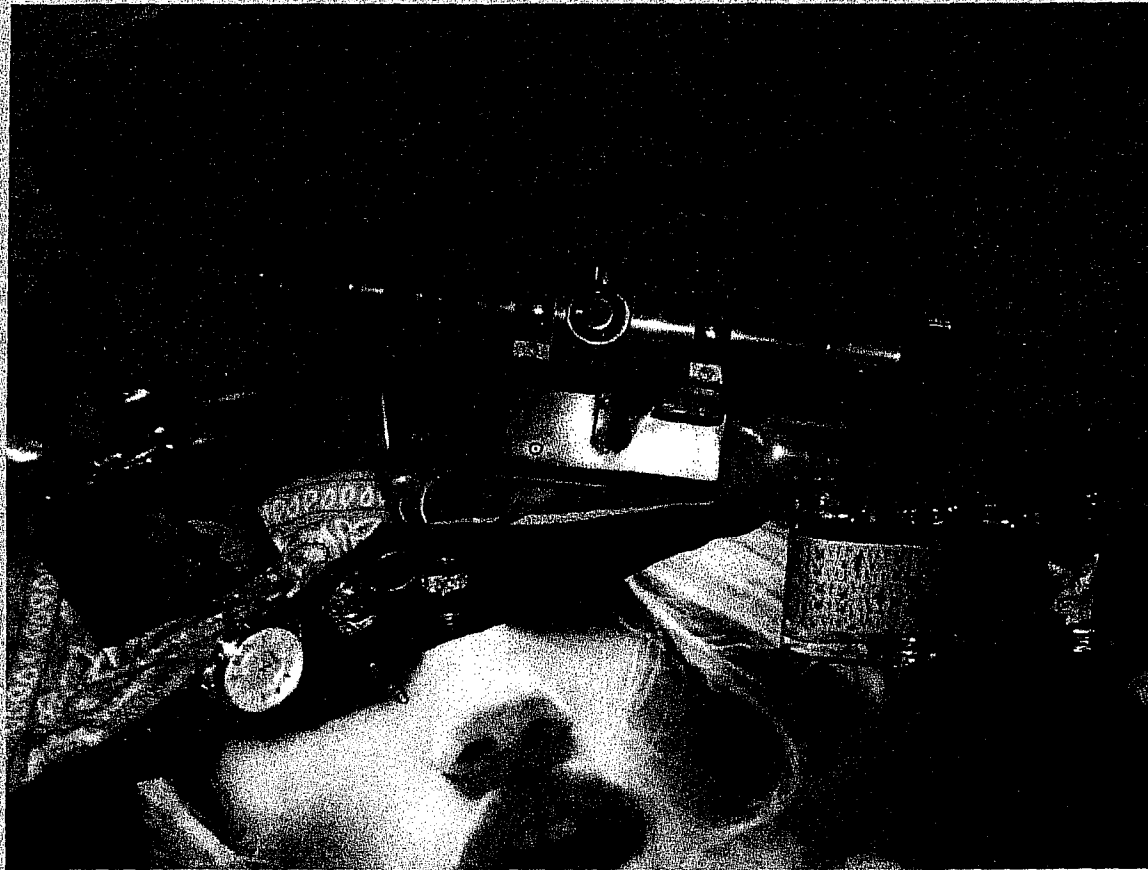
Ammunition confiscated in the past year



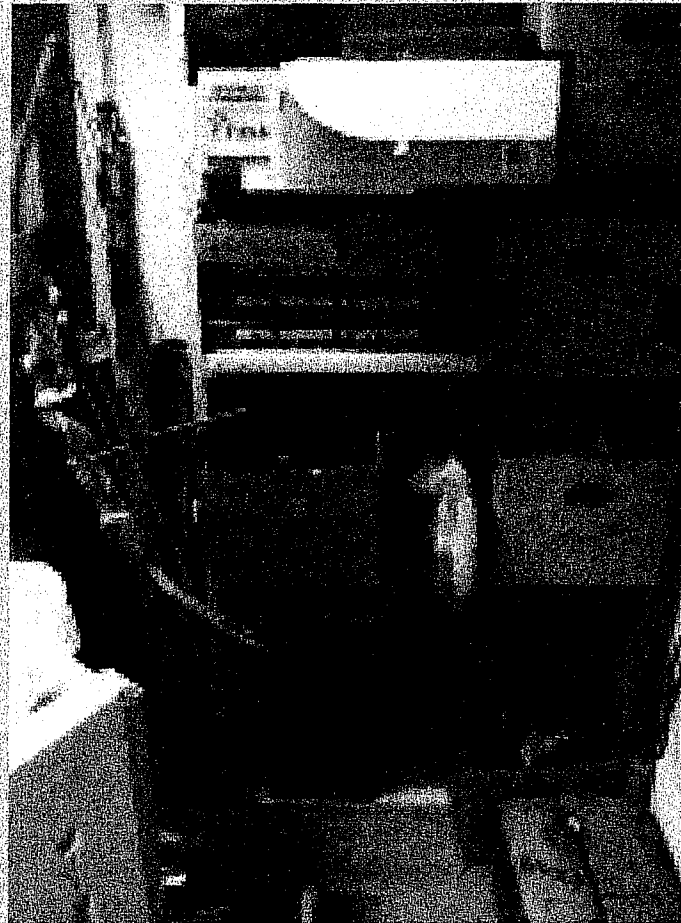
Knives confiscated over the same period



Body armor confiscated by Adult Probation officers over the past year



Ackerson rifle confiscated by Juvenile Probation officers in the past year



Confiscated weapons/ammunition from the past year by Adult Probation -in Evidence locker



Homemade weapon confiscated by Juvenile Probation officers over the past year