



UNITED PROBATION OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
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Testimony of Dalvanie Powell, President
UPOA – United Probation Officers Association
State of Labor During Covid-19

Committee on Civil Service and Labor
Wednesday January 27, 2021 at 10:00 AM

Dear Chairperson Miller, and all members of the Labor Committee,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the impact COVID-19 has had on our members.

Under normal circumstances, Probation Officers' work is challenging. COVID-19 has made the situation even more challenging. Our members work seven days a week to guarantee public safety. The members of the United Probation Officers Association in Adult and Family Services since COVID-19 hit persevered despite the safety and health challenges they faced, as they never stopped performing their core central functions and continued to provide vital services and resources to the probation clients and the community at large.

Public safety is our primary focus. With that said, the members of UPOA continue to make field visits, in some cases working side-by-side with NYPD, FBI, U.S. Marshal officers, and other law enforcement brothers and sisters who salaries and pensions are better than ours. Our frontline Officers continue to conduct intakes and prepare investigation as well other reports for the courts. The **Supervision** Officers' virtual contacts with the probation clients have been enhanced. Although we are trying to work more effectively and efficiently remotely, many of the members are not properly equipped with department cell phones and laptops, which means they have to report to the office more often to get their work done ,which unnecessarily puts our members at a greater risk .Nor do we have the appropriate vehicles that other law enforcement agencies are provided as our vehicles are compact and they're not equipped with partitions.

When we were ordered by the Mayor's Office to monitor a group of inmates from Rikers Island in hopes of decreasing the spread of the virus among the staff and inmates on Rikers Island, the Department of Probation administration with the consent of this union re-instituted the electronic monitoring (EM) program. The EM unit has also been beneficial to our probation clients; it gives those adult probation clients who are in violation status or are not in compliance the ability to remain in the community and receive services while being closely monitored—24 hours a day, 7 days a week—instead of being placed in custody and being put at risk to infection from the virus. However, the Officers who are assigned to this unit are the ones who risk their lives by going to homes and shelters to place the monitoring devices on the individuals and setting up the equipment, and they are the first to be present in the event that there is an alert, or if they suspect the device has been tampered with.

In addition, the members of UPOA have gone beyond their call of duty by working at the DOP NEON (Neighborhood Opportunity network) sites, making sure those in need are supplied with food and, if need be, clothing. During the holidays, my members delivered turkeys to the homes of their probation clients and brought joy to many families.

Two or three times during the year the Officers partake in one of the many DOP intervention programs known as Youth Wrap, where they work along the youth and young adults who are on probation. Despite the pandemic, the Officers are committed and continue to mentor these groups.

To our understanding, the Department has been supplying PPE. But when COVID-19 hit, this union did a massive distribution of PPE to our members, such as masks, face shields, and gloves. We have now incorporated as a Welfare Fund Benefit a reimbursement to our members for any PPE they purchase.

Although there are not any clients reporting to the office unless warranted, we have asked the Department to install Plexiglass on the desk of each Officer, as we have to protect ourselves from each other as well. To date, the Department has purchased the plexiglass; however, they are requiring the officers to share the plexiglass and transport the plexiglass from where it is stored to their desk and then return it after each use.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 does not discriminate. We have had several members who have contracted the virus, and we lost one member to the virus this past May. Recently, we have been seeing an uptick in those members who have shown to be positive for the virus. There is a major concern among the members who are assigned to work at the courthouses as COVID-19 cases continue to rise. When we follow up with the Department regarding the cleaning of locations where there were positive cases, they report to be in compliance with the CDC regulations.

Recently, when the City first offered the vaccine to first responders, it was very challenging for the members to make appointments. However, once we relayed this concern to the administration, they made sure additional provisions were now available where the Officers are able to take the vaccine at the Somos Vaccination Hubs throughout the city.

Once again, the members of UPOA continue step up and volunteer to work at the City-run COVID-19 Vaccine Hubs (also know as Points of Dispensing, or PODs), where they provide security and conduct check-ins and other functions to make sure those who were eligible was vaccinated and for the process to run smoothly.

We are not sure how many members have been vaccinated. But we have recommended that the administration partner with the Health Department and consider having the vaccines administered onsite such as the NEONS to our UPOA members and other DOP staff only.

Enclosing we ask that you support the early retirement legislation as most of our members are in their 50's and older who work under very stressful, physically taxing and dangerous conditions.

We also are requesting frequent cleaning of air vents and carpets at all our worksites.



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Finally, we would like to recommend that the city post COVID 19 consider giving municipal employees the option to work remotely based on the agency operational needs as the unknown such as 911 and COVID 19 has forced us to rethink our lives as well as how we must work smarter and safer.

Once again I thank you