

# **ACLU Urges General Assembly To Oppose Bills Abolishing Probation And Parole**

## **Testimony Before House Judiciary Committee Advocates For Emphasis On Rehabilitation**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**COLUMBIA, SC – Proposed legislation that would abolish probation and parole is fiscally imprudent and jeopardizes public safety, according to Victoria Middleton, Executive Director of the ACLU South Carolina Office.**

**In written testimony submitted today to the South Carolina House Judiciary Committee, Middleton told lawmakers that they should focus on ways to depopulate an already overcrowded state prison system by emphasizing rehabilitation rather than incarceration, and by rolling back costly mandatory minimum sentences that have resulted in the over-incarceration of non-violent offenders.**

**"The adult corrections system needs to do more, not less, to rehabilitate the prisoners who are able to return as productive members of our society," Middleton wrote in her testimony. "All the evidence shows that this would reduce recidivism and lower crime in vulnerable neighborhoods and result in cost savings to the state."**

**South Carolina Attorney General Henry McMaster is a leading supporter of bills currently in front of both the House and Senate that would abolish parole and probation and create a constitutionally-suspect diversionary "middle court" that would operate outside of the existing judicial system. The South Carolina Department of Corrections Director has already gone on record as opposing the bills, saying they would further strain the state's overburdened prisons, jeopardize the safety of prison employees and spark a costly building spree of new prisons.**

**An ACLU-recommended audit of the state's prison system by the U.S. Department of Justice is ongoing after charges emerged last year of lax security, inmate abuse and a politicized, hostile work environment, and the General Assembly is awaiting the recommendations of the Sentencing Reform Commission about revising sentencing laws in South Carolina.**

**"We strongly urge the General Assembly to wait until the completion of the audit and Sentencing Reform Commission's report before making major changes to probation and parole," Middleton wrote.**

**Middleton told the committee that abolishing parole and probation would strip prisoners of an invaluable incentive for working to improve their lives and would hinder their reintegration into the community.**

**"Abolishing parole will mean that prisoners will be released without any level of supervision or support," Middleton wrote. "Hoping for the best is not an adequate guarantee of public safety. We need to adequately fund probation and parole to reduce caseloads of those who supervise parolees and permit more face-to-face visits. This would enable probation and parole professionals to provide the kind of supervision that will guide former prisoners into a successful reintegration into society."**

**Middleton also urged the committee to follow the leads of numerous other states which have recently passed legislation establishing and expanding proven diversion options – including drug courts for drug offenders.**

**"The expertise that we have here in this state – research institutions, criminologists, community organizations, law enforcement professionals and corrections officials – need to join forces to find solutions to this problem," Middleton wrote. "Our corrections system is broken, and public safety and the public trust deserve smart solutions to fix it. The proposal before us, unfortunately, is not a step in the right direction."**

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