



# MICHAEL SCHRAA

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## Testimony on AB 198

Thank you, Chairman Spiros and members of the committee, for allowing me to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 198, which provides increased protection for Probation and Parole officers and their families.

Specifically, this bill includes agents working in probation, extended supervision, parole, community supervision, or aftercare. Assembly Amendment 1 to AB 198 clarifies that aftercare includes Native American youth under supervision of a tribe or band. I will simply refer to all of these officers as POs.

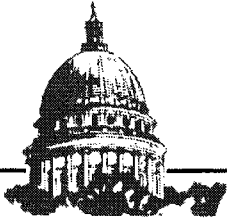
Currently, causing bodily harm to a PO is a class H felony, carrying a penalty of up to \$10,000, 6 years or both. This bill will expand that protection to bodily harm against family members and to threats against the officers and families.

Anyone who works with offenders knows that threats are common, not just against the agent, but also against his or her family. This is concerning when the person making the threat is incarcerated, but even more so when the person is in the community. Offenders who making these threats are much more likely to gain access to personal information about the POs and their families, putting them at even greater risk. This is simply unacceptable.

As you are well aware, I am a passionate advocate for our corrections personnel. They are overworked, underpaid, and underappreciated; yet they continue to fulfill the difficult role of keeping the public safe.

As you are also well aware, I am generally opposed to unnecessary increases to criminal penalties because that increases the severe overcrowding in our Department of Corrections facilities, further straining the safety of our officers. This, however, is a worthy exception because it decreases danger to these brave public servants.

There is no reason that POs and their families should not be protected from violence and the threat of violence. I am sure that after hearing the public testimony today, you will be as determined as I am to provide the reasonable protections of this common sense bill.



WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

**DAVE HANSEN**

SENATOR – 30TH DISTRICT

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**Testimony in support of AB-198**  
**Senator Dave Hansen**  
**9/18/19**

Thank you Chairman Spiros and members of the committee for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 185, bi-partisan legislation I am proud to have introduced with Representative Schraa.

Unfortunately I am unable to testify in person today due to previously scheduled dental surgery.

This issue was brought to my attention by Amanda Holz, a probation and parole agent from my area, who told me that threats to and assaults of probation and parole agents and their families are a serious concern for them, but that under current law these threats and assaults are not treated the same as those made to police officers, district attorneys and judges.

In her email Agent Holz said:

*"I am writing to you out of concern that it appears threats to a probation agent or correctional employee is not covered under our current legislature.*

*"This was brought to my attention yesterday as I and my family were threatened while I was conducting a face contact at the Fond du Lac county jail.*

*"In my attempt to hold the offender accountable for their behavior and not depreciate the seriousness of the violation as well as protect myself and my family, I searched for the statute and you can imagine my disappointment when I found my profession to be overlooked when I am working with dangerous individuals."*

Current law makes it a Class H felony to assault a probation, parole or extended supervision agent. But it does not extend that same penalty to those who assault or threaten their family members as it does for other officers of the court and law enforcement.

With respect to the amendment, most of the 11 tribes in Wisconsin have court systems. In those court systems they too have positions comparable to probation and parole agents, often referred to as aftercare agents. After introducing the bill, it came to our attention that tribal probation and parole agents, or after care agents as they are referred to were inadvertently left out when the original law making it a Class H felony to assault a probation or parole agent was passed.

Our amendment simply adds tribal P&P agents to the Class H felony category and also applies it to tribal P&P agents families.

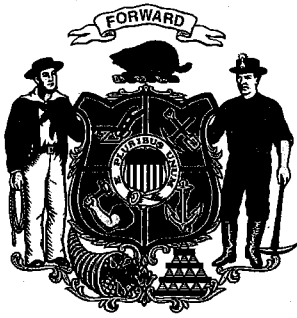
Like Representative Schraa, and I'm sure each of you, I have a deep respect for those who serve the law and put their lives on the line to protect us, our families and our communities. Like Representative Schraa, I too, do not support unnecessary increases in criminal penalties.

However, in this case I believe they are warranted both as a means of protecting our P&P agents and their families and as a matter of fairness. Every person who dedicates their lives to protecting us should be afforded the same protection under the law whether they are police officers, corrections officers, district attorneys, judges or the officers covered under this bill.

Representative Schraa and I have both heard from agents who, like Agent Holz, have been threatened or had family members threatened or assaulted. We both want our state to protect them and their families and for them to know we value their service.

For these reason I hope you will support Assembly Bill 198.

Thank you.



# Wisconsin Department of Corrections

Governor Tony Evers | Secretary Kevin A. Carr

**Testimony for AB 198**  
**Public Hearing for the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety**  
**Wednesday, September 18, 2019 11:00 am**

Good Morning Chairman Spiros and Committee Members. Thank you for hearing my testimony in support of AB 198. My name is Lance Wiersma and I am the Administrator for The Division of Community Corrections.

The Division of Community Corrections (DCC) employs approximately 1,200 Probation and Parole Agents across the state. Our dedicated staff are charged with supervising over 66,000 individuals placed by the courts on probation, parole or extended supervision in the community. DCC's mission is to enhance public safety by managing and reducing an individual's risk to commit a new crime. Probation and Parole Agents do this by assessing risk and needs for programming and providing supervision in collaboration with community partners so the individuals we supervise can change their behavior and repair the harm they have done.

The primary mission of the Department of Corrections is to protect the community. Our staff utilize a variety of tactics to accomplish this mission. These include case planning, rapport building, skill practice, program referrals and identification of community based resources. Probation and Parole agents are required to meet with individuals on their caseloads on a regular basis. These one-on-one interactions occur every work day at our 131 field offices. Our agents also conduct home visits, meeting face-to-face with individuals, and sometimes their families, at their homes. Most of our staff manage varied caseloads that include a spectrum of convictions, programmatic needs, and identified risk levels.

Probation and Parole agents enforce conditions, and are required to investigate violations of supervision. They have authority to issue apprehension requests, conduct home searches, and place subjects into custody. Agents can also recommend jail sanctions and revocation of supervision in response to violations.

Our interactions with individuals convicted of crimes are unique. Agents often switch roles between social worker, advocate, law enforcement, and investigator. Every day, we strive to be fair and consistent during our interactions and interventions. Regardless, the nature of the job often put Agents in an adversarial role with the individuals we supervise. These adversarial roles can lead to dangerous situations, including threats. This is why this bill is important.

We are in support of AB 198, because it recognizes our unique role in the criminal justice system and recognizes the risk our dedicated staff willingly accept every day to serve the public good. Expanding the law to include protection to our agents' immediate family members and elevating the protection to include a threat of battery provides additional accountability during face-to-face interactions, especially during the enforcement of rules. Thank you for your time.