



106 North Bronough Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301 floridataxwatch.org o: 850.222.5052 f: 850.222.7476

Senator George S. LeMieux
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

Comments to the Honorable Scott Plakon, Chair, and members of the House Justice Appropriations Subcommittee regarding HB 1037 --- Education Incentives for Probation

My name is Dominic M. Calabro and I am President and CEO of Florida TaxWatch, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit, research institute & government watchdog that, for more than 42 years, has worked hard to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of Florida government and promote a fair and equitable system of taxation.

Florida TaxWatch has long been a recognized state leader in researching and recommending smart justice policies that promote public safety, conserve taxpayer dollars, and ensure former inmates lead dignified, generative lives. Our past research report [*Lower Costs & Crime: Criminal and Juvenile Justice Reform Options for Florida*](#), among many other criminal justice publications, was instrumental in providing policy solutions to address over-incarceration and recidivism in the state of Florida.

Building upon our past successes, Florida must continue to improve existing systems and processes that may be outdated or inefficient. Although probation serves as a practical alternative to incarceration, Florida's probation system falls short in several ways. **Florida has the fifth-largest probation population in the United States at 179,500 individuals**, and by the end of a tumultuous 2020, **1 in every 98 Floridian adults was on probation**. Within three years of release, **40 percent of individuals on community supervision will have their supervision revoked**.

The state of Florida must strive for smart probation policies that simultaneously promote community safety and enable individual opportunity. I applaud efforts by you and your colleagues to implement a graduated incentives system that encourages compliance and stable employment. Employment has been cited to reduce recidivism by as much as 50 percent, and by using educational attainment as the vehicle to achieve higher employment, these efforts produce innumerable economic benefits over a lifetime.

Evidence-based incentives rooted in educational attainment can also produce hundreds of millions of dollars in fiscal savings to taxpayers and significant return on investment for the state of Florida. By shortening supervision sentences and reducing recidivism, Florida can save a considerable portion of the more than \$230 million spent on community corrections. Furthermore, our research consistently finds that better-educated individuals contribute more in taxes over time (by spending more in the local economy), reduce the need for public assistance programs, and are less likely to be processed through the criminal justice system. All these outcomes yield downstream fiscal savings that are not immediately obvious.

The importance of maintaining a safe and effective probation system cannot be underscored enough. Improving the system to incentivize educational attainment leads to demonstrable economic and fiscal benefits, but even more so, **education can restore dignity and well-being to thousands of Floridians and their families**.

We look forward to working with you and your colleagues as we continue to make Florida government more accountable to our taxpayers and to ensure smart justice policies persist.