

Probation Officer

Supervise people serving sentences in the community, and try to keep them from coming back.

TYPICAL PAY

\$66,270

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$47k to \$108k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

4 to 5 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

No

anyone can do it

WHERE YOU WORK

County and state probation offices, courthouses, jails, people's homes

How you get there

- 1 High school diploma** Grade 12
Keep your record clean. A felony conviction or recent drug use will disqualify you from almost every department.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Criminal justice, social work, psychology or sociology are the usual ones. In the federal survey, 88% of employers say a bachelor's degree i...
- 3 Internship or volunteer work with a court** A semester
Many departments hire from their own interns. It is also the fastest way to find out whether you can handle the job.
- 4 Apply and survive the hiring process** 3 to 9 months
Written test, panel interview, deep background investigation, drug screen, sometimes a polygraph and a medical exam. Expect three to nin...
- 5 Academy and field training** 3 to 12 months
A state or agency academy, then months carrying a reduced caseload under a training officer.
- 6 Your own caseload** After training
Usually 60 to 120 people, depending on the department and the risk level of the cases.

Pros and cons

- + A stable government job with a pension and loan forgiveness
- + No law school or licensing exam, just a four-year degree
- + Genuinely helps some people change direction
- Caseloads are far bigger than anyone thinks is safe
- Enormous amounts of paperwork with court deadlines
- Home visits carry real risk and some states do not arm you

Good to know

A shoemaker invented probation

John Augustus, a Boston bootmaker, began posting bail for people in 1841 and supervising them himself instead of letting them go to jail. Massachusetts made it law in 1878, and the idea spread across the c...

Your report can change the sentence

Before sentencing, a judge reads a presentence investigation report written by a probation officer. It sets out the offense, the person's history, risk assessment and a recommendation. Few documents in t...

Optional boosts

Move to a federal job. Specialized caseloads. A master's degree. Supervisor track.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists (21-1092.00)

O*NET OnLine: Probation Officers and Correctional Treatment Specialists

United States Courts: careers in the federal judiciary

USAJOBS, the federal government's official hiring site

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/probation-officer>



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