

# Celebrating Federal Pretrial Services

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I SIT DOWN to write these reflections with a profound sense of gratitude and pride. A century has passed since the inception of United States Probation—a milestone that not only marks the endurance of an institution but also the evolution of justice, rehabilitation, and public safety in our nation. Having devoted the better part of my professional life to U.S. Pretrial Services and witnessing firsthand the growth of our partnership with U.S. Probation, I am honored to celebrate this historic anniversary and offer my perspective on our shared journey.

## One Hundred Years of Service and Transformation

The roots of federal probation trace back to 1925, when Congress passed the Federal Probation Act, ushering in a new era for the federal judiciary. The act was a bold statement of faith in the potential for human change, providing courts with the authority to suspend sentences and place individuals under the supervision of probation officers. In the early days, federal probation operated with limited resources but limitless conviction, laying a foundation built upon the belief that justice could be both firm and compassionate.

Over the decades, federal probation has evolved in response to changes in law, society, and our understanding of human behavior. What began as a small cadre of officers with handwritten case files has grown into a robust national system, harnessing technology, research, and community partnerships to guide individuals towards accountability and reintegration. And the seeds for all this were planted rather informally, in a local court in

Massachusetts. In 1841, John Augustus (now considered to be the first American probation officer) attended police court to bail out a defendant deemed by society “a common drunkard.” This man became the first probationer. When the defendant returned to court with Augustus three weeks later, his demeanor and appearance had changed dramatically. History underscores the intersection between bail, intervention, and rehabilitation. Our past shows us that probation and pretrial services were meant to be partners from the start.

## The Emergence of U.S. Pretrial Services

In 1982, close to 60 years after the birth of federal probation, the Pretrial Services Act was signed into law. This act responded to a growing recognition of the need to address the challenges facing defendants prior to trial, protect community safety, and ensure fair administration of justice. Thus, U.S. Pretrial Services was established to perform the distinct tasks of investigating defendants, assessing risks, making recommendations to the court, and supervising those released pending trial.

I was fortunate to become a pretrial services officer in 1991. Throughout my career I was inspired by trailblazing chiefs like Glen Vaughn, Southern District of California; Wilma McNeese, Western District of Pennsylvania; Primitivo Rodriguez Jr., Northern District of California; and later, Carol Miyashiro, District of Hawaii. These chiefs and others navigated uncharted territory—building policies, procedures, and relationships from the ground up. It was a time of innovation, adaptation,

and partnership. They were passionate about pretrial justice and the success of U.S. Pretrial Services. From the outset, it was clear that the road ahead would be difficult but best traveled together, hand in hand with our probation colleagues while maintaining and protecting the independence of pretrial services.

## Building a Partnership: From Parallel Paths to Shared Purpose

At first glance, the missions of federal probation and federal pretrial services appear distinct—one focused on post-conviction supervision, the other on pretrial risk assessment and oversight. Yet, as both a participant and witness to our intertwined histories, I can attest that our paths are distinct but parallel rails upon which the train of justice runs.

The partnership between us is born of necessity and strengthened by shared values. Both probation and pretrial services are committed to the fair administration of justice, the reduction of unnecessary detention, the protection of communities, and the rehabilitation and support of individuals as they navigate the criminal justice process. We exchange information, coordinate strategies, share resources, and reinforce each other’s efforts—not only for the benefit of the courts, but for the people and communities we serve. We accomplish these goals with dignity and respect as guiding principles.

## Collaboration in Action

Perhaps nowhere is our partnership more visible than in the daily work of probation and pretrial services officers across the country. Officers frequently consult on cases, share

knowledge, and connect resources. Our collaboration extends to joint training initiatives and policy development. Together, we have confronted many challenges, such as the opioid epidemic, technological advances, incorporating research into our efforts, improving officer safety, responding to legislative mandates, and establishing programs offering alternatives to incarceration.

I recall countless instances where the seamless handoff between pretrial supervision and probation made a profound difference in a person's journey. Early, coordinated intervention often sets the tone for rehabilitation, reduces recidivism, and provides individuals with continuity of care, which is a critical factor in their success.

#### *Innovation and Adaptation*

Our partnership has also been defined by a willingness to innovate. Whether adopting evidence-based practices, leveraging data analytics, or piloting new treatment programs, both federal probation and federal pretrial services have stood at the forefront of criminal justice reform. When judicial mandates change or new challenges arise—be it rapid technological shifts or a global pandemic—we face them together, united in our commitment to justice.

#### **Impact and Legacy**

Over the past century, the United States Probation System has touched many lives. It has offered hope where there was despair, accountability where there was chaos, and opportunity where there was only punishment. Alongside it, since 1982 U.S. Pretrial Services has helped ensure that the presumption of innocence is more than a legal phrase; it is a lived reality for defendants awaiting trial. "In our society, liberty is the norm and

detention prior to trial or without trial is the carefully limited exception" (Rehnquist, 1987 *U.S. v. Salerno*).

Throughout my career, I have been honored both to participate in and witness stories of transformation. This includes individuals who, with proper guidance and support, overcame addiction, were reunited with families, found employment, were given a second chance, and contributed positively to their communities. I had the unique opportunity to serve as acting chief U.S. probation officer in the Central District of California and have seen such stories from both the pretrial and post-conviction perspectives.

These successes are not solely the product of one agency, but the result of a collective effort between officers, judges, treatment providers, and community partners working together. It is also important to point out that the daily contributions of phenomenal administrative, information technology, and support staff in our system are critical and help to make these achievements possible.

#### **Looking Ahead: Challenges and Opportunities**

The future of our partnership is as promising as it is challenging. The world grows more complex, and so too do the needs of those we serve. Issues like cybercrime, social inequity, drug and mental health trends, safety, legislative changes, and budget challenges demand agility, empathy, and continued collaboration. Our agencies must invest in training, recruitment, and technology, always with an eye towards diversity and evidence-based practices.

I am confident that the spirit that has animated our work for a century—the belief in the possibility of change, the commitment to fairness, the courage to adapt—remain

alive and well. The next hundred years will bring new obstacles, but also new opportunities to uphold justice as defined by the U.S. Constitution.

#### **A Personal Reflection and a Call to Celebration**

As I reflect on a career devoted to the cause of pretrial justice, I am filled with pride—not only in what we have accomplished, but in how we have accomplished it. The partnership between those accomplishing the distinctive missions of U.S. Probation and U.S. Pretrial Services is not merely an administrative convenience; it is a testament to the power of collaboration, the necessity of compassion, and the enduring belief in redemption. In addition to an amazing staff and exceptional judges while I served as Chief U.S. Pretrial Services Officer in the District of Nevada, I had two great partners in Chis Hansen, Chief U.S. Probation Officer, District of Nevada (Retired) and Chad Boardman, Chief U.S. Probation Officer, District of Nevada (Retired), who consistently exemplified integrity, excellence, comradery, support, and friendship.

To all those who have served, who continue to serve, and who will serve in the years to come: thank you. Your dedication, professionalism, and humanity have shaped lives and communities in ways that statistics can only begin to capture. As we celebrate this centennial milestone, let us honor our shared legacy, recommit to our mission, and move forward—together, as partners in justice.

Congratulations on one hundred years of federal probation, and to the unbreakable partnership that guides us into the next century.