

No. 24. An act relating to earned discharge from probation.

(S.45)

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 28 V.S.A. § 200 is added to read:

§ 200. PURPOSE OF PROBATION

It is the policy of this State that the purpose of probation is to rehabilitate offenders, reduce the risk that they will commit a subsequent offense, and protect the safety of the victim and the community.

Sec. 2. 28 V.S.A. § 205(b) is amended to read:

(b)(1) At or before the sentencing hearing, the prosecutor's office shall inform the victim of the mid-point review process for probationers, and that the defendant may be eligible for early discharge from probation pursuant to sections 251 and 252 of this title.

(2) The victim of a listed crime as defined in 13 V.S.A. § 5301(7) for which the offender has been placed on probation shall have the right to request and receive from the Department of Corrections information regarding the offender's general compliance with the specific conditions of probation. Nothing in this section shall require the Department of Corrections to disclose any confidential information revealed by the offender in connection with participation in a treatment program.

Sec. 3. 28 V.S.A. § 251 is amended to read:

§ 251. DURATION OF PROBATION

(a) The court placing a person on probation may terminate the period of probation and discharge the person at any time if such termination is warranted by the conduct of the offender and the ends of justice.

(b)(1) Upon the Commissioner's motion to discharge pursuant to subsection 252(d) of this title, the sentencing court shall terminate the period of probation and discharge the person at the midpoint of the probation term unless the prosecutor seeks a continuation of probation within 21 days of receipt of notice of the Commissioner's motion; and

(A) the court finds by a preponderance of the evidence that termination and discharge will present a risk of danger to the victim of the offense or to the community; or

(B) the court finds by clear and convincing evidence that the probationer is not substantially in compliance with the conditions of probation that are related to the probationer's rehabilitation or to victim or community safety.

(2) If the court grants the prosecutor's motion to continue probation, it may continue probation for the full term or any portion thereof. The court shall also review the conditions of probation and remove any conditions that are no longer necessary for the remainder of the term.

(c) A probationer shall not be deemed ineligible for discharge or term reduction due to unpaid restitution, fees, or surcharges.

Sec. 4. 28 V.S.A. § 252 is amended to read:

§ 252. CONDITIONS OF PROBATION AND MIDPOINT REVIEW

(a) Conditions, generally. The conditions of probation shall be such as the court in its discretion deems reasonably necessary to ensure that the offender will lead a law-abiding life or to assist the offender to do so. The court shall provide as an explicit condition of every sentence to probation that if the offender is convicted of another offense during the period for which the sentence remains subject to revocation, then the court may impose revocation of the offender's probation.

(b) Probation conditions. When imposing a sentence of probation, the court may, as a condition of probation, require that the offender:

* * *

(c) Certificate. When an offender is placed on probation, he or she shall be given a certificate explicitly setting forth the conditions upon which he or she is being released.

(d) Review and recommendation for discharge.

(1) The Commissioner shall review the record of each probationer serving a specified term during the month prior to the midpoint of that probationer's specified term and ~~may~~ shall file a motion requesting the

sentencing court to dismiss the probationer from probation ~~or deduct a portion~~
~~of the specified term from the period of probation~~ if the offender:

(A) has successfully completed a program or has attained a goal or goals specified by the conditions of probation ~~not been found by the court to have violated the conditions of probation in the six months prior to the review;~~

(B) is not serving a sentence for committing a crime specified in 13 V.S.A. chapter 19, subchapters 6 and 7; 13 V.S.A. chapter 72, subchapter 1; or 13 V.S.A. § 2602; and

(C) has completed those rehabilitative or risk reduction services required as a condition of probation which have a duration that is set and knowable at the outset of probation.

~~The Commissioner may include in the motion a request that the court deduct a portion of the specified term for each condition completed or goal attained. Any motion under this section shall be made pursuant to a rule adopted by the Commissioner under 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 that shall provide that the decision to make or refrain from making a motion shall be made at the sole discretion of the Commissioner and shall not be subject to appeal.~~

(2) If the probationer does not meet the criteria set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection, or if the court denies the Commissioner's motion to discharge, the Commissioner shall file a motion requesting the sentencing court to discharge the probation term once the probationer meets the criteria set forth in subdivision (1) of this subsection.

(3) The prosecutor shall make a reasonable effort to notify any victim of record of a motion filed to reduce a probationer's term pursuant to this subsection. "Reasonable effort" means attempting to contact the victim by first-class mail at the victim's last known address and by telephone at the victim's last known phone number.

Sec. 5. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS; PROBATION MIDPOINT
REVIEW; REPORT

(a) Beginning on July 1, 2021, the Department of Corrections shall collect the following data regarding the probation midpoint review process:

(1) the number of probation discharge or probation term reduction motions filed by the Department;

(2) the number of probation terms that were reduced or terminated pursuant to this Act; and

(3) the amount of time reduced from probation terms as a result of probation term reduction motions granted by the court.

(b) On or before August 1, 2022 and August 1, 2023, the Department shall report to the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee with the data collected pursuant to this section and any recommendations for further legislative action to improve the probation midpoint review process.

Sec. 6. SENTENCING COMMISSION; PROBATION TERMS FOR
MISDEMEANORS

During the 2021 legislative interim, the Vermont Sentencing Commission shall review 28 V.S.A. § 205 and the December 3, 2020 report of the Pew Charitable Trusts, “States Can Shorten Probation and Protect Public Safety,” and consider whether Vermont should limit the duration of probation terms for misdemeanor offenses to two years. On or before October 1, 2021, the Commission shall issue its recommendation pursuant to this section to the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee.

Sec. 7. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2021.

Date Governor signed bill: May 12, 2021