

AN ACT RELATIVE TO VICTIM WITNESS ADVOCATE RETIREMENT CLASSIFICATION

H.2753/S.1784

1 WHAT DOES H.2753/S.1784 AIM TO DO?

H.2753/S.1784 seeks to change the retirement classification of Victim Witness Advocates from Group 1 to Group 2 to accurately reflect the duties and dangers of this profession. Sadly, it is not uncommon for advocates to experience threats, intimidation, and violence as they assist victims and witnesses in our District, Juvenile, and Superior Courts. Much like DCF social workers, court officers, and probation officers (all Group 2 employees), advocates work directly with vulnerable and at-risk populations that often present volatile cases that routinely place them at risk for verbal, physical, and emotional abuse.

2 WHO ARE VICTIM WITNESS ADVOCATES?

Victim Witness Advocates were created by the Massachusetts Victim Bill of Rights (G.L. c. 258B) to help victims, witnesses, and their family members during a criminal trial. Advocates serve as a victim's primary liaison to the prosecution team and provide support that enables their safe and effective participation in a prosecution. Advocates work with court personnel, law enforcement, community-based agencies, and others to provide a holistic approach to the safety and wellbeing of victims and witnesses – often times requiring them to go beyond the call of duty.

3 WHY MAKE THIS CHANGE?

In addition to enhancing retirement benefits, this reclassification will further professionalize the field to retain qualified and experienced advocates. High turnover rates are common with many advocates leaving for jobs in the social work or post-conviction fields due to more competitive pay and benefits. Losing experienced advocates means losing the institutional knowledge and relationships they forge with local court personnel, police, and community resources to effectively assist victims and witnesses. It also reduces experienced supervision needed by new advocates who deal with complex and multifaceted cases on a daily basis.