



ETHICAL ISSUES

Probation Officers Carrying Firearms

In 2012, Jeffery Matthew McCoy, a probation officer working for the Oklahoma Department of Correction, was fatally shot while conducting a routine visit with a probationer. Beth Hicks, a probation officer in Kendall County, Texas, was found murdered outside her home. Her murder remains unsolved. And in 1997, Steven Tielker of Fort Wayne, Indiana, was murdered by a client he was counseling. The offender, who had been convicted of molesting children, was required to meet with the counselor. Before killing Tielker, the offender fatally shot his probation officer.

Think About It

Increasingly, probation officers are being armed, representing a move away from social worker toward law enforcement officer. The arming of probation officers raises many questions.

1. Is it ethical for probation officers to carry firearms?
2. Are those who typically enter the field of probation like those who choose policing, or do these professions draw from different pools of candidates?

3. Do differences in populations of police and probation officers matter in terms of ability to kill an offender if needed?
4. Should probation officers receive the same firearms training as police officers?

If probation officers are armed with firearms, ultimately a client will be shot and possibly killed. This raises additional important questions to ponder.

5. What psychological assistance to the probation officer, if any, should be provided by the state?
6. What are the legal ramifications if a probation officer kills a client? For example, can probation officers possibly be brought up on homicide charges?
7. Who should pay for the defense of an officer that shoots or kills a client—the state or the officer?
8. Will carrying a firearm impede a probation officer's important role to help the client and is it ethical?