5-year impact in California

Reducing probation terms from 3 years to 1 year for misdemeanors and 5 years to 2 years for felonies could amount to $2.1B in reduced incarceration, probation, and judicial and operational costs over 5 years. At the same time, it could give over 24,000 life years back for people who avoid reincarceration for technical violations.

The opportunity

Roughly 300,000 adults are on probation in California, with each of them costing taxpayers over $4,400 annually. Overall, the state spends $2 billion each year to incarcerate people for supervision violations – $235 million of which is spent on incarcerating people for victimless, technical violations like coming home late from work.

20%

Prison admissions due to probation violations (2017)  
Adults currently on misdemeanor or felony probation in CA

The current recommended probation sentence in CA is 3 years for misdemeanors and 5 years for felonies, but people remain on probation for longer due to exorbitant fines and fees or violations of supervision conditions.

People who remain on probation for extended periods of time are less likely to be successful because even minor or technical violations of the law may result in a violation of probation resulting in more fines and longer terms of probation.

43 states have some form of probation caps

Georgia

Georgia passed a probation reform bill in 2017 to, among other things, shorten probation sentences and reduce the caseloads of probation officers who are spread thin.

Michigan

In 2017, Michigan passed a package of bills to minimize punishments for “technical violations” of probation and allow judges to shorten probation time for good behavior. Since the enactment of Michigan’s reforms prison admissions for probation violations have dropped over 20% and the state is currently voting on a package of bipartisan bills to further decrease probation lengths.

South Dakota

The state has been updating its probation system since 2014, enacting a law in 2017 that allows people convicted of lesser crimes to be discharged from probation after a year for good behavior.