

Connecticut Board of Pardons and Paroles



At a Glance

ERIKA TINDILL Esq., Chair

John DeFeo, Executive Director

Richard Sparaco, Director of Planning, Research and Development

Established - 1883 (Pardons) and 1957 (Parole); merged in 2004

Statutory authority - Conn. Gen. Statutes Section(s) 54-124a, and 54-131k

Central office - 55 West Main Street, Suite 520, Waterbury, CT 06702

Number of employees - 77

Organizational structure - Pardons Division; Parole Hearings Division (including the Interstate Compact Unit); Planning, Research and Development Division; and Victim Services (Victim Advocates mandated by statute and funded by the Office of Victim Services).

The Board of Pardons and Paroles is an autonomous agency which is attached to the Department of Correction for “Administrative Purposes Only” (see: Conn. General Statutes Section 4-38f).

Mission

The mission of the Board of Pardons and Paroles is to facilitate the successful reintegration of suitable offenders into the community.

Vision

1. Reduced recidivism
2. More investment in crime prevention (redirect / refocus resources)
3. Reduced victimization
4. Less violent, safer communities
5. An increased capacity to measure all of the above (performance measures)

Values

We believe:

- That public safety is best achieved if criminal justice policy takes both punishment and rehabilitation into account;
- In victims' rights;
- That everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and respect;
- In the potential for positive change;
- In the utilization of evidence-based practices in our decision making;
- In maximizing resources; and
- That community safety is achieved through multi-agency collaboration

Statutory Authority

The Board of Pardons and Paroles plays a critical role in the State's criminal justice system. Under the Connecticut General Statutes, the Board has the independent decision-making authority to (1) grant or deny parole in accordance with 54-125, 54-125a, 54-125e and 54-125g, (2) establish conditions of parole or special parole supervision in accordance with section 54-126, (3) rescind or revoke parole or special parole in accordance with sections 54-127 and 54-128, (4) grant commutations of punishment or releases, conditioned, provisional, or absolute, in the case of any person convicted of any offense against the state and commutations from the penalty of death in accordance with section 54-130a and 53-130e.

The Board consists of 20 members, six of whom, including the Chairperson, are full-time. The Governor is responsible for appointing all members of the Board with the advice and consent of both houses of the General Assembly. The five full-time members, plus seven part-time members, serve exclusively on parole release panels; seven of the part-time members serve exclusively on pardons panels; and the Chairperson may serve on both parole release and pardons panels. The Governor specifies the member being appointed as Chairperson, the full-time and part-time members being appointed to serve on parole release panels, as well as the members being appointed to serve on pardons panels. The members of the Board must be qualified by education, experience or training in the administration of community corrections, parole or pardons, criminal justice, criminology, the evaluation or supervision of offenders or the provision of mental health services to offenders. No panel of the Board of Pardons and Paroles can hold a hearing to determine the suitability for parole release of any person unless the Chairperson of the Board has made reasonable efforts to determine the existence of and obtain all information deemed pertinent to the panel's decision and has certified that all such pertinent information determined to exist has been obtained or is unavailable. (CGS Sec. 54-124a)

Public Service

In 2012/2013, the Board of Pardons and Paroles conducted 3,104 case reviews for the purposes of granting parole or the revocation or rescission of parole. Additionally, the Board received approximately 983 pardons applications.

Pardons Division

In 2012/2013, the Pardons Division received 983 applications. Of those received, approximately 717 were deemed eligible for review and 333 of these were granted either a Provisional, Full or Conditional pardon. The overall pardons grant rate was 46%.

The Pardons Division receives and reviews petitions for all forms of clemency, whether absolute or conditional, from both current and former offenders, as well as applications for sentence commutation. The Pardons Division maintains a case file on all individuals who have applied for a pardon and acts as a liaison to the public for information inquiries and correspondence. Officers assigned to the Pardons Division review all applications and prepare and distribute dockets, as well as conduct investigations on each application, which include criminal record queries and interviews with witnesses and victims.

The pardons process in Connecticut helps to remove barriers to employment for various applicants who are successful in obtaining a pardon by the Board. The Board may grant a Provisional Pardon or a Full Pardon to an ex-offender. A Provisional Pardon specifically addresses the removal of barriers to employment, but it does not erase a person's criminal record. A Full Pardon, if granted, completely erases an individual's criminal record. All types of pardons may be issued with various conditions attached as specified by the Pardons Board. Being granted a pardon may increase chances of employment for the individual since the stigma of having a criminal record is either removed in the case of a Full Pardon, or mitigated in the case of a Provisional Pardon. Securing a pardon also increases a person's ability to further their education, especially in cases where felony convictions are pardoned. In such cases, persons applying for student loans are able to indicate on the loan application document that they have never been convicted of a felony or crime in Connecticut.

Connecticut's pardons process is unique in that the granting authority lays with a Board, not the Governor. Persons who have completed their sentences (including parole and probation,) and have shown themselves to be rehabilitated, have the opportunity to be a part of the community without the stigma of a criminal record. Persons granted Full Pardons can lawfully say that they have never been convicted of a crime in Connecticut nor arrested for any conviction that has been pardoned. This, in turn, contributes to Connecticut's economy since those pardoned are more likely to be law-abiding, gainfully employed, tax-paying citizens who purchase goods and services.

Parole Hearings Division

The Board may release an inmate on parole if it appears "that there is a reasonable probability that the inmate will live and remain at liberty without violating the law, and that such release is not incompatible with the welfare of society." (C.G.S. Secs. 54-125 and 54-125a.) Any offender serving a total effective sentence of more than two years (with the exception of certain statutory and policy exclusions) is eligible for parole. Although there is no right to parole release, the Board is statutorily required to conduct a hearing when the inmate has served either 75 % of their period of incarceration, if they are designated as a nonviolent offender, or at 85%, if they are designated as a violent offender.

Parole Officers provide general information to newly-sentenced, parole-eligible offenders about the laws and policies regarding parole release, calculation of time, general conditions of release, supervision practices, revocation and rescission policies and panel hearings. Parole Officers assigned to the correctional facilities are available to answer questions from Department of Correction (DOC) personnel and inmates regarding all aspects of the parole process.

Parole Officers interview all applicants and complete comprehensive summaries that provide Board members with information regarding an applicant's criminal, social and correctional history, as well as details of their current offense(s). Parole Officers present cases to a panel of the Board to determine suitability for parole release. If the offender is paroled, the summaries form the basis upon which Parole Officers from the Department of Correction's Parole and Community Services Division (DOC-PCS) develop case management, treatment and supervision plans.

Parole Officers initiate parole summaries for all eligible offenders, identify violent offenders for 85% designation and gather all statutorily-mandated documentation. During fiscal year 2012/2013, the agency reviewed approximately 904 cases that were presented to the Board for designation as violent offenders.

Additionally, parole hearings were conducted for 1972 offenders during 2012/2013. These hearings were conducted by panels of the Board via video conference and live at various correctional facilities.

Parole Officers designated to act as Hearing Examiners conduct fact-finding hearings to determine whether a violation occurred or whether the nature of the new information is such that it would affect the suitability decision of a parole panel. The Parole Officer develops a recommendation based on their finding of the conduct or new information and presents their findings and recommendation(s) to a panel of at least two Parole Board members. The panel makes a final decision regarding the revocation or rescission of parole and imposes disposition as it deems appropriate. In 2012/2013, Parole Officers conducted 1132 revocation and rescission hearings.

Interstate Compact Unit

The Interstate Compact Unit works in conjunction with the Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision (ICAOS), whose membership includes paroling authorities across the nation to guide the transfer of offenders in a manner that promotes effective supervision strategies consistent with public safety, offender accountability, and crime victims' rights. It also provides for inmates to be paroled to other state, federal and immigration detainees.

Planning, Research and Development Division

The Planning, Research and Development Division (PRD) was established in December 2011 with an Acting Director to assist the agency with the mandates of Section 37 of Public Act 08-01 and Conn. Gen. Statutes section 54-124a(d)(4) that require the use of a collaborative offender risk-assessment strategy and risk-based structured decision-making. The PRD Division is also responsible for providing statistical information for the agency's internal purposes, such as employment of best practices and quality control. The Division collects, analyzes and assists in

the external distribution of data, such as recidivism rates, to criminal justice stakeholders and the general public. The focus of the PRD Division is directed toward the maintenance of agency processes that consistently produce responsible pardons and evidence-based parole release decisions. In addition, measuring the effectiveness of the Board's policies and processes, the Division will assist in streamlining the agency's organizational structure to ensure maximum cost-effectiveness.

In 2012/2013, the Division continued to be staffed with Parole Officers on special assignment pending the conversion of positions through attrition, as well as the staff psychologist, all operating under the direction of an Acting Director. The Officers continued to maintain reduced caseloads and have been assisting with new agency initiatives including the implementation of a statewide risk assessment system and a structured decision-making process, as well as the development and implementation of an upgraded automated case management system.

Victim Services

Mandated by Connecticut General Statute, two Victim Advocates from the Office of Victim Services (OVS) are available to assist crime victims who choose to participate in the decision-making processes of the Board.

Improvements/Achievements 2012-2013

Pardons Division

During 2012/2013, the demand for pardons applications continued unabated. The Board experienced an overall 9% increase in applications compared to the previous fiscal year.

Feedback on the use of a new Provisional Pardon Certificate that was introduced in the last fiscal period has continued to be positive. The new Certificate format was introduced in direct response to feedback submitted by pardon recipients stating that the reporting of convictions on the prior format negatively affected them when seeking employment.

All convicted persons must still disclose their convictions, if asked, to any prospective employer. The Board also continued to streamline and improve the application process and now publishes all minutes of pardon hearings on the agency's website.

Parole Hearings Division

In order to make sound parole release decisions, the Board partnered with the Department of Correction to begin implementation of a statewide evidence-based offender risk assessment tool. The Statewide Collaborative Offender Risk Evaluation System (SCORES) is the result of this collaboration. The SCORES is a collection of comprehensive risk assessment tools that take into account an offender's static and dynamic criminogenic factors in order to predict the offender's likelihood to commit another crime. The assessment tools measure both risk and need at various points: when an offender enters jail or prison; after serving a period of incarceration and

participating in treatment or programming, but prior to release into the community; and after a period of supervision in the community. The SCORES is adapted from the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) which is being used successfully in other states. The system is supported by the University of Cincinnati's Center for Criminal Justice Research, is user-friendly, fully automated, non-proprietary and slightly more predictive than other risk assessment tools.

In July, a two-day workshop was held at the Department of Correction Center for Training and Staff Development that was facilitated by staff from the Center for Effective Public Policy, a non-profit organization dedicated to assisting organizations with development of successful policy and practice. Training participants included DOC and BOPP administrators, management and supervisors, line staff and subject matter experts. Participants were assigned to workgroups to begin the framework to help implement the SCORES system throughout both the Department of Correction and the Board of Pardons and Paroles. An oversight team and several workgroups (communication, training, policy, offender classification, information technology (IT) and quality assurance) with staff from each agency - at all levels - were formed and met regularly to ensure a smooth transition to the new SCORES. Fall of 2013 is the target date for full implementation of the SCORES for the Board.

In August, all Parole Officers and Board members received training on the implementation of the new Decision Information Summary (DIS) to help implement the Structured Decision-Making Framework. Taken together, the Parole Board's use of the SCORES and SPDM framework will likely result in a decrease in recidivism by ensuring that the most suitable offenders are released after successfully completing the most appropriate treatment and programming with effective stipulations and supervision in the community.

In September, staff received training on the new upgraded web-based automated case management system. This new enhanced system will allow the Board to achieve a paperless parole hearing process and will be able to provide much needed data on the parole population.

In March, P.A. 13-3, AN ACT CONCERNING GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND CHILDREN'S SAFETY was passed which, effective 7/1/13, will prohibit inmates convicted of a violent crime or 2nd degree burglary from using risk reduction earned credits (RREC) to become eligible for parole sooner than they otherwise would be. This new legislation will require inmates convicted of these crimes to continue to serve 85% of their sentences before being eligible for parole, regardless of any credits they receive. This will greatly impact the parole population and hearing numbers in the coming fiscal year.

Planning, Research and Development Division

The Planning, Research and Development Division assisted in facilitating the SCORES workshops and is tasked with the responsibility of heading up the Quality Assurance committee and Customization subcommittee. The Division also led the training for all agency staff on the formulation and implementation of the new Decision Information Summary (DIS) now completed by Parole Officers and presented to the Board at parole hearings to assist in structured decision-making. Additionally, the Division oversaw the upgrade of the Board's automated case

management system with a statewide release of the system in October, as well as an upgrade of the agency's website and information. Lastly, the Division helped to introduce and oversaw the passage of key legislation during the 2012/2013 legislative session.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Governor appoints members of the Board of Pardons and Paroles. Board members are chosen to reflect the racial diversity of the State. Members are appointed with the advice and consent of either house of the General Assembly, and their terms are coterminous with the appointing Governor or until a successor is chosen, whichever is later.

The Chairperson, Erika Tindill, of New Haven, serves as the Board's chief executive and administrative head. In addition to the Chairperson, the Board of Pardons and Paroles is comprised of the following members:

Full-Time Parole Board Members: Mr. Robert Murphy of Madison; Mr. John O'Connor of West Haven (retiring on 7/1/13); Mr. David McCluskey of West Hartford; Ms. Foye Smith of Hartford; and one vacant position.

Part-Time Parole Board Members: Mr. Remi Acosta of Waterbury; Mr. David May of East Hampton; Ms. Pamela Richards of Ivoryton; Ms. Kelly Smayda of Ellington; Ms. Jennifer Zaccagnini of Watertown; and two vacant positions.

Pardons Panel Members (All part-time positions): Mr. Joseph Elder of Hartford; Mr. Joseph Milardo of Middletown; Mr. Robert Smith of Southington; Mr. Russell Palmer of Berlin; Mr. Nicholas Sabbetta of Burlington; Ms. Julia Wasserman of Sandy Hook; and one vacant position.