

Connecticut Board of Pardons and Paroles



At a Glance

CARLETON J. GILES, *Chairperson*

Richard Sparaco, *Executive Director*

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: 70 F/T & 6 P/T (allocated) – 65 F/T and 2 P/T (filled as of 6/30/20)

Recurring Operating Expenses: 6,567,994

Organizational structure: Pardons Division; Parole Hearings Division (including the Interstate Compact Unit); Legal and Legislative Division; Planning, Research and Development Division; and a Victims Services Unit (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 Responsibility

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 Section(s) 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 Section(s) 54-127 and 54-128; and (4) grant commutations of punishment or releases, conditioned, provisional, or absolute, in the case of any person convicted of any offense against the state.

The statutory make-up of the Board consists of fifteen (15) members, ten (10) of whom, including the Chairperson, "shall" be appointed to serve full-time and five (5) of whom "may" be appointed to serve part-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 Governor also specifies the member being appointed as Chairperson as well as the full-time and part-time members. 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. In Fiscal Year 2019/2020 there were nine (9) Full-Time members, plus three (3) Part-Time members.

Public Service

In Fiscal Year 2019/2020, the Board of Pardons and Paroles reviewed a total of 3992 cases for parole consideration and 1,820 applications for pardon consideration. Panels of the Board conducted 2,739 hearings for the purposes of granting, rescinding or revoking parole and conducted 621 reviews resulting in the granting or denying of various types of pardons. The Board implemented a new automated case management system "ePardons" for on-line pardon applications and developed a virtual platform for all parole hearings as a result of the global pandemic and emergency declaration from the Governor. The Board also added a Human Resource Specialist to assist with the ever expanding needs of the agency; an Interpreter Clerk to assist with translations for all documents, hearings and public inquiries; and several Parole Officer Trainees to assist in both the parole and pardons divisions.

Pardons Division

The Pardons Division receives and reviews petitions for all forms of pardons, whether absolute or provisional, from both current and former offenders, as well as applications for sentence commutation (clemency). The Pardons Division maintains a database 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 records queries and interviews with witnesses and victims. Additionally, officers assigned to the Pardons Division complete courtesy investigations for the State of New York, visiting and interviewing applicants who now reside in Connecticut and are applying for relief in New York. A written investigation, proof of residency, employment and other relevant information are submitted to the requestor.

The pardons process in Connecticut can help remove barriers to employment for various applicants. The Board may grant a Certificate of Employability (provisional) or an Absolute Pardon to an ex-offender. A Certificate of Employability specifically addresses the removal of barriers to employment, but it does not erase a person's criminal record. An Absolute Pardon, if granted, completely erases an individual's criminal record. Pardons may be issued with various conditions before granted. 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 an Absolute Pardon, or mitigated in the case of a Certificate of Employability. 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 Absolute Pardons can lawfully say that they have never been convicted of, nor arrested for a crime in Connecticut.

In 2019/2020, the Pardons Division received a total of 1,820 applications, which constituted a 3% decrease in applications received in the previous fiscal year. Of those received, approximately 1,206 were deemed eligible for review (a 15% increase from the previous fiscal year) and 534 of these were granted either a Certificate of Employability or Full/Absolute pardon. Of the 534 cases granted, 370 were through the expedited pardons process. A total of 90 applicants were granted a Certificate of Employability. The overall pardons grant rate during this period increased to 86%. It should be noted that three (3) full pardon hearings that were scheduled at various court locations had to be continued due to the closure of the court. These hearings resumed virtually in July of 2020.

Parole Hearings Division

The Board may grant 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 (2) years (with the exception of certain statutory and policy exclusions) is eligible for parole. Although there is no right to parole release, the Board generally conducts hearings for eligible offenders six (6) months prior to statutory eligibility. The Board provides

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. The Board also determines if an offender should serve 50% or 85% of their sentence before becoming eligible for parole. Parole Officers assigned to correctional facilities are available to answer questions from Department of Correction (DOC) personnel and the offender regarding all aspects of the parole process.

Parole Officers initiate case summaries for all eligible offenders and gather statutorily-mandated documentation. Parole Officers interview applicants, conduct risk assessments, 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 these cases to a panel of the Board at a parole hearing 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 designated to act as Hearing Examiners for the Board's Revocation Process conduct fact-finding hearings to determine whether a violation of parole occurred or whether the nature of the new information is such that it would affect the suitability decision of a parole panel. During a bifurcated hearing process, the Parole Officer develops a recommendation based on their finding of the conduct or new information. The Hearing Examiner later presents a summary of their findings and recommendations to a panel of the Board. The panel makes the final decision regarding the revocation or rescission of parole and imposes a disposition as it deems appropriate.

In 2019/2020, The Board conducted parole release hearings for 2,117 offenders (a 1% decrease compared to the previous fiscal year.) The majority of these hearings were conducted via video conference while some were conducted in person at a correctional facility. All were conducted via video after March of 2020. The Board also conducted 622 revocation and rescission reviews and/or hearings (a 12% decrease from the previous fiscal year.) In accordance with Public Act 15-84 "An Act Concerning Lengthy Sentences for Crimes Committed by a Child or Youth and the Sentencing of a Child or Youth Convicted of Certain Felony Offenses," the Board conducted 22 hearings for eligible offenders with 16 cases approved for parole and six (6) cases denied parole.

- **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 offenders to be paroled to other states for supervision, as well as to other state, federal and immigration detainees. In 2019/2020, the unit processed a total of 313 transfer requests, accepted 150 cases from other jurisdictions and approved 128 cases for transfer to other jurisdictions.

Legal and Legislative Division

The Legal & Legislative Division serves as the agency's legal counsel, legislative liaison, and liaison to the Office of the Attorney General on all legal matters affecting the agency. The Division advises the Chairperson, Executive Director, and other Board employees on matters ranging from policy, human resources issues, and agency compliance to federal and state constitutional questions. In 2019/2020, the Legal and Legislative Division consisted of a Legislative and Administrative Advisor and a Paralegal. In 2019/2020, the Division oversaw 31 federal and state lawsuits; drafted and provided implementation assistance for 2 new agency policies; revised and updated 7 existing agency policies; drafted, submitted, and adopted 2 new regulations; and developed and provided training for Board Members, Hearing Examiners, and new employees, as well as developed and provided training for the Board's Records Unit. As agency ethics liaison, the Division arranged for employee ethics training, assisted with required financial filings, and provided advice regarding agency and state ethics rules.

Planning, Research and Development Division

The Planning, Research and Development Division (PRD) is responsible for providing internal and external statistical information 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 to measuring the effectiveness of the Board's policies and processes, the Division's mission is to assist in streamlining the agency's organizational structure to ensure maximum cost-effectiveness. The PRD also assists the agency with the use of a collaborative offender risk-assessment strategy and a risk-based decision-making process.

In 2019/2020, the Planning, Research and Development Division consisted of a Supervising Staff Psychologist, Associate Research Analyst and Research Analyst, all operating under the direction of a Director/Executive Director. The Division also participated in an internship program with Quinnipiac University, the University of New Haven, Central Connecticut State University and Naugatuck Valley Community College. The internship program is growing in size and popularity among students and advisors and this year the Division hosted one (1) intern from each of these institutions. Unfortunately, the internship program was suspended in March of 2020 due to the pandemic.

Victim Services

Victim Services at the Board consists of two Victim Advocates from the Office of Victim Services (OVS) who are available to assist crime victims who choose to participate in the decision-making processes of the Board. The positions were mandated by P.A. 08-01 and are funded by the Office of Victim Services.

Improvements/Achievements

Pardons Division

In 2019/2020, the Board implemented a new internal case management system for the processing of pardon applications known as “ePardons.” The Board went live with a public portal on March 1, 2020, that provides online access for the submission of pardon applications by the public, therefore creating a more efficient paperless case management system. All paper applications were phased out on June 1, 2020 and the Board continues to provide assistance to those who require help with portal instructions through our online video tutorials, community seminars and dedicated staff who troubleshoot any issues the public may encounter.

Parole Hearings Division

In Fiscal Year 2019/2020, the Board continued to hold hearings for all eligible offenders six months in advance of projected parole eligibility dates. The Board continued reviewing non-violent male and female offenders for transfer parole and conducting competency evaluations for the purpose of providing legal counsel to parole violators.

The Board continued to work with Yale Law School regarding research and findings that were conducted by Samuel Jacobs Criminal Justice Clinic of the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization regarding the parole revocation process. A report on the process was released by Yale in September 2017, and in November of 2017, the Board implemented a new procedure for revocation and rescission hearings.

- ***Interstate Compact Unit***

The Unit continued to oversee all the duties of Compact, which include requests/responses, progress reports, case closure notices, early termination reports and any correspondences between states. The Unit continued to successfully collaborate with the Parole and Community Services Division of the Department of Correction regarding supervision of all compact offenders paroled to Connecticut. In Fiscal Year 2019/2020, the unit had an overall 98% compliance rate with the Compact, which is well above the national average.

Legal and Legislative Division

In Fiscal Year 2019/2020, the Division provided substantial legal support to the Board and provided legal expertise in areas such as the law of pardons and paroles, constitutional law, labor and employment law, contracts, administrative law, privacy law, and legislation. The Division also provided legislative support leading up to and during the 2020 regular legislative session. The Division monitored and analyzed legislation; served as an informational and technical resource to legislators and their constituents; and drafted proposed legislation, testimony, and amendments.

Planning, Research and Development Division

In Fiscal Year 2019/2020, the unit provided a critical role in supporting the implementation of the electronic Pardons system. The unit assisted in the implementation of the public portal for “ePardons,” as well as the data entry, management, and triaging of applications and workflow to assist the Pardon’s unit.

The division continued to collect data on the Statewide Collaborative Offender Risk Evaluation System (SCORES) and Structured Decision Making Framework (SDMF) which are administered by Parole Officers and Board Members, respectively and are utilized in the parole decision-making process. The Division also continued to assist the Criminal Justice community by tracking and analyzing the parole and special parole population by working to develop new reporting tools and methods that will help understand outcomes. Given limitations of the systems currently in place, constant research and development into better methods and systems continue to be a priority. These efforts will allow this unit to successfully and efficiently gather all data necessary to assist the Board in policies and process for the future.

Information Reported as Required by State Statute

The Governor appoints all members of the Board of Pardons and Paroles. 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. All members are appointed and serve on both parole release panels and pardon release panels. The make-up of the Board for Fiscal Year 2019/2020 was as follows:

- **The Chairperson, Carleton Giles** of Middletown (appointed as full-time board member September 2013, appointed as Chairperson 05/13/14, reappointed as Chairperson 4/15/19) serves as the Board's chief executive and administrative head;
- **Full-Time Parole Board Members:** Rufaro Berry of Naugatuck (appointed 10/17/14); Patricia Camp of Bloomfield (appointed Part-Time Board Member 10/17/14 & Full-Time Board Member 02/19/16; Joy Chance of Bloomfield (appointed 10/17/14); Stephen Dargan of West Haven (appointed 06/21/17); Michael Pohl of Manchester (appointed 5/8/19); Carmen Sierra of New Britain (appointed 02/19/16); Nancy Turner of Groton (appointed 06/21/17); Jennifer Zaccagnini of Oakville (appointed Part-Time Board Member 05/27/2008 & Full-Time Board Member 05/13/14); *As of 06/30/20 there was one (1) vacant Full-Time Board member position;*
- **Part-Time Parole Board Members:** Terry Borjeson of Newington (appointed 10/07/14 - resigned 10/18/19); Pamela Richards of Ivoryton (appointed 05/27/08 – resigned 04/01/20); Kelly Smayda of Ellington (appointed 11/07/08); and Deborah Smith-Palmieri of Guilford (appointed 6/25/20). *As of 06/30/20, there were three (3) vacant Part-Time Parole Board member positions.*