

# Connecticut Board of Pardons and Paroles



## *At a Glance*

**CARLETON GILES, Chairperson**

**Richard Sparaco, Executive Director**

**Vacant, 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 - 58 (full-time) Note: (Board Member Vacancies: 3 full-time and 6 part-time)**

**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. Five full-time members, plus seven part-time members, serve exclusively on parole release panels; seven 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 2013/2014, the Board of Pardons and Paroles conducted 2783 case reviews for the purposes of granting parole or the revocation or rescission of parole. Additionally, the Board received and reviewed approximately 832 pardons applications.

### ***Pardons Division***

In 2013/2014, the Pardons Division received a total of 832 applications which constituted a 15% decrease in application received in fiscal year 2012/2013. Of those received, approximately 556 were deemed eligible for review (a 22% decrease from the previous fiscal year) and 241 of these were granted either a Provisional, Full or Conditional pardon. The overall pardons grant rate was 43% (a 3% decrease compared to previous fiscal year).

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, nor arrested for a crime in Connecticut. 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 grant an inmate 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 generally conducts hearings for eligible inmates six months prior to statutory eligibility. 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 2013/2014, the agency reviewed approximately 968 cases that were presented to the Board for designation as violent offenders (a 7% increase compared to the previous fiscal year).

Additionally, parole hearings were conducted for 1771 offenders during 2013/2014 (a 10% decrease compared to the previous fiscal year). 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 2013/2014, Parole Officers conducted 1012 revocation and rescission hearings (an 11% decrease compared to the previous fiscal year).

## **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 detainers. In

2013/2014, the unit accepted 65 cases from other jurisdictions approved 65 cases for transfer to other jurisdictions.

### ***Planning, Research and Development Division***

The Planning, Research and Development Division (PRD) was established in December 2011 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's mission is to assist in streamlining the agency's organizational structure to ensure maximum cost-effectiveness.

In 2013/2014, the Division continued to be staffed with Parole Officers devoting time to special projects, a staff psychologist and an Associate Research Analyst (effective May 2014), all operating under the direction of a Director/Executive 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 2013-14**

### ***Pardons Division***

On 5/16/14, P.A. 14-27, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission with Respect to Certificates of Rehabilitation was signed into law. This act creates a new document called a certificate of rehabilitation and allows the Board of Pardons and Paroles (and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch) to issue it to eligible offenders. As is the case with the provisional pardon that the board issues under existing law, the certificate relieves an eligible offender of certain barriers to gaining employment or obtaining a credential, such as an occupational license, resulting from a criminal conviction. It

must be labeled “certificate of employability,” “certificate of suitability for licensure,” or, if appropriate, both. The board and CSSD must generally follow the same procedures and use the same criteria to issue a certificate as the board does for a provisional pardon. The Board began working with CSSD for implementation, effective 10/1/14.

### ***Parole Hearings Division***

In 2013, the statutory requirement to hold a hearing when an 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 was eliminated under Public Act 13-3.

The Board also continued its partnership with the Department of Correction on the implementation of a statewide evidence-based offender risk assessment tool. The Statewide Collaborative Offender Risk Evaluation System (SCORES) was 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, which 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 October of 2013, staff from the Board and the Department participated in a two-day training program for certification in the ORAS/SCORES. In March of 2014, four Board Staff were selected and certified by staff from the University of Cincinnati as official “Trainers” in the SCORES assessment. These staff will now be responsible for training and certifying all new users for the SCORES assessment. In May of 2014 the Board began implement the SCORES assessment on a pilot basis with full implementation for a new discretionary release hearing expected in September, 2014.

### ***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 continued working with the Department of Correction and the University of Cincinnati in creation of an automated system for the SCORES assessment. The Division also continued to be involved with the upgrade of the Board’s and the Department of Correction’s case management system with the final statewide release of the system in June of 2014.

## **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, Carleton Giles of Middletown, 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; Ms. Jennifer Zaccagnini of Watertown. *There are three vacant full-time parole board member positions.*

**Part-Time Parole Board Members:** Mr. David May of East Hampton; Ms. Pamela Richards of Ivoryton; Ms. Kelly Smayda of Ellington. *There are four vacant part-time parole board member positions.*

**Pardons Panel Members (All part-time positions):** 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. *There are two vacant part-time pardon board member positions.*