

Connecticut Board of Pardons and Paroles



At a Glance

JENNIFER MEDINA ZACCAGNINI, *Chairperson*

Joseph Garibaldi, *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: 69 F/T & 6 P/T (allocated) – 59 F/T Recurring

Operating Expenses: 6,096,236

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 Board may also, in its sole discretion, upon request and by unanimous decision of a panel, terminate supervision prior to expiration of a sentence, in accordance with Section 54-129. Such early termination of parole supervision is considered for individuals who meet eligibility and suitability criteria, as described in Board Policy II.04.

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 which appointed member serves 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. At the start of Fiscal Year 2022/2023 there were eight (8) Full-Time members. This number grew to nine (9) Full-Time members in early 2023. The Board did not add any Part-Time members during FY 2022/2023.

Public Service

In Fiscal Year 2022/2023, the Board of Pardons and Paroles reviewed 3,533 cases related to the parole process, and 2,213 applications for pardon consideration. Panels of the Board conducted 2,631 hearings for the purposes of granting, denying, rescinding, revoking parole or discharging

someone from parole or special parole, and 1,700 reviews resulting in the granting or denying of various types of pardons.

In Fiscal Year 2022/2023, the Board sought to heighten the quality assurance of the virtual platform implemented in FY 2020/2021 (due to the pandemic and emergency declarations from the Governor). This virtual platform hosts all parole and pardons hearings. FY 2022-2023 saw the addition of a staff Media Production Technician which has increased the efficacy and efficiency of the virtual platform's interface with the Board, the correctional facilities, halfway houses, and with victims participating in the hearings from their individual remote locations. Following confirmation hearings in March 2023, the Governor appointed Jennifer Medina Zaccagnini as the new Board Chairperson, and after the retirement of Executive Director Sparaco, Chairperson Zaccagnini appointed Deputy Director Joseph Garibaldi to the position of Executive Director.

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). Parole Officers assigned to the Pardons Division review all applications, conduct investigations on each application, which include criminal records queries and interviews with victims and witnesses. The Parole Officers assigned to the division prepare and distribute dockets for Board Members who will hear the cases.

Connecticut is one of the few states in which the granting authority for pardons and commutation rests 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.

The pardons process in Connecticut can help remove barriers to employment for suitable 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. Certificates of Employability mitigate the stigma of having a criminal record, thereby improving sustaining employment opportunities. An Absolute Pardon, if granted, completely erases an individual's criminal record. Granting an Absolute Pardon to an individual diminishes the stigma associated with having a criminal record, increases opportunities for student loans, access to higher education, and to employment. An Absolute Pardon allows the individual to state legally that they have never been convicted of a felony or crime in Connecticut.

In 2022/2023, the Pardons Division received a total of 2,213 applications, which constituted a 1% increase in applications received from the previous fiscal year. Of those received, approximately 1,716 were deemed eligible for review (a 7% increase from the previous fiscal year). A total of 1,700 cases were docketed and 1,616 were granted either a Certificate of Employability or a Full/Absolute Pardon. Of the cases granted an erasure, 803 were through the expedited pardons process. A total of 31 applicants were granted a Certificate of Employability. The overall pardons grant rate during this period was 95%.

In 2022/2023, the Pardons Division received 420 applications for commutations. After returning 36 applications due to missing information, and deeming an additional 70 applicants as ineligible for commutation, 314 applicants were approved for hearings and of those, 68 individuals were granted a commutation. Chairperson Zaccagnini paused the Commutation process in April in order to revise the policy and procedures.

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 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 during which the Board Members determine suitability for parole release. When an offender is granted parole, the prepared summaries form the basis upon which Parole Officers from the Department of Correction (DOC) Parole and Community Services Division (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 Fiscal Year 2022/2023, The Board conducted parole related hearings for 2,093 offenders (a 1% increase compared to the previous fiscal year.) All hearings were conducted via video conference. The Board also conducted 538 revocation and rescission reviews and/or hearings (a 25% 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 17 hearings for eligible offenders with 10 cases approved for parole and seven (7) cases denied parole. Additionally, the Board

conducted 458 Early Parole Discharge Reviews and approved 259 statutorily eligible and suitable parolees for Early Termination of Supervision.

During FY 2022-2023, the Board experienced a decrease in requests for both Medical and Compassionate Parole. Based on the three (3) cases that met the criteria, the Board granted two (2) compassionate releases (a 67% decrease from the previous fiscal year) and one (1) medical release (a 50% decrease from 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 offenders to be paroled to other states for supervision, as well as to other state, federal, and immigration detainers. In 2022/2023, the unit processed 133 transfer requests, accepted 85 cases from other jurisdictions and approved 48 cases for transfer to other jurisdictions.

Legal and Legislative Division

The Legal & Legislative Division serves as the agency's legal counsel, legislative liaison, and as 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 human resources issues and agency compliance to federal and state constitutional questions.

In FY 23, the Division oversaw 27 federal and state lawsuits; in consultation with the Chairperson and the Executive Director the Division drafted a new policy on commutation of sentence; revised and updated 4 existing policies; and developed and provided training for Board Members and new employees. 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. The division also represented the Board in Freedom of Information hearings.

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 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 the Statewide Collaborative Offender Risk Evaluations System (SCORES) and the Board's evidenced-based decision-making process referred to as "Structured Decision Making" (SDMF).

In Fiscal Year 2022/2023, the Planning, Research and Development Division consisted of a Supervising Psychologist, Associate Research Analyst, and Research Analyst. Under the agency reorganization by the new Chairperson, the Planning, Research and Development Division now

operates under the direction of the Supervising Psychologist. The Division continues to accept applications from individuals interested in research in the field of criminal justice.

Victim Services

Victim Services at the Board consists of three (3) Victim Advocates from the Office of Victim Services (OVS). The Victim Advocates are available full-time to assist crime victims who choose to speak, or provide a written statement to the Board concerning whether the incarcerated offender should be released to the community supervision of parole; and to the nature of any conditions that may be imposed should the individual offender be granted discretionary parole. Victim Advocates similarly assist victims of offenders/ex-offenders seeking relief through the pardons and commutations processes. The Victim Advocate positions are mandated by P.A. 08-01, and are funded by the Office of Victim Services.

Improvements/Achievements

Pardons Division

In Fiscal Year 2022/2023, the Board continued to prioritize the quality assurance of the “ePardons” case management system for processing online pardon applications. Efficient and thorough review of applications, accessible guidance for applicants needing assistance navigating the system through both online video tutorials and direct contact with the knowledgeable and dedicated staff supported members of the public seeking either pardon or certificate of employability.

Petitioners for pardons appear before the Board virtually via ZOOM, and these hearings are broadcast to public via YouTube. While Fiscal Year 2022/2023 witnessed only a 1% increase in the number of pardon applications received, the focus on efficient operations and quality assurance measures resulted in a 16% increase (over the previous year) in applications advancing to a final outcome.

Parole Hearings Division

In Fiscal Year 2022/2023, the Board implemented revisions to the Structured Decision Making Framework (SDMF) initiated by the framework’s developer, Ralph Serin, Ph.D. The implementation of these changes occurred after a delegation of Board Members, the Executive Director, and staff from the Planning, Research and Development division attended a three-day training organized and hosted by the Association of Paroling Authorities International (APAI). Dr. Serin and his research associate provided the training, which was also attended by representatives from Boards of Paroles from other states and from Canada, who also use the evidence-based framework in their decision-making processes. The Board’s commitment to remaining current with research informing its work continued through monthly in-service trainings, primarily provided by the Board’s Executive Director, Supervising Psychologist, Planning, Research and Development Division, and invited experts in the fields of assessment, risk and rehabilitation.

In alignment with the Governor’s termination of the public health emergency declaration, in May 2023, Chairperson Zaccagnini rescinded the emergency Transfer Parole order that had been in effect during the COVID pandemic. In June, the Chairperson implemented a new procedure for the Board’s issuance of Transfer Parole opportunities for individuals granted discretionary parole.

Interstate Compact Unit

Connecticut's Interstate Parole Unit is among the top in the nation regarding compliance percentages for Interstate cases through the Compact. During the Fiscal Year 2022/2023, our compliance was at or above 98% for Case Closure Notices, Case Closure Replies, Progress Reports, Request for Reporting Instructions Replies, and Transfer Replies. Our Violation Responses compliance was 100%.

Also of note during this reporting period, the Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision (ICAOS) celebrated its 20th anniversary during the Annual Business Meeting in New York. The Board's Deputy Director/Deputy Compact Administrator represented the CT Board at that noteworthy meeting. Connecticut's active engagement with this Interstate Commission is another example of our commitment to ongoing training based on current research and practices across the country.

Legal and Legislative Division

During FY 23, the Division continued to provide substantial internal legal support to the Board, 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 provided legislative support leading up to and during the 2023 regular legislative session and served as an informational and technical resource to legislators and their constituents; the division drafted proposed legislation in support of the Board, as well as testimony expressing the Board's position on proposed legislation.

The Division monitored and analyzed proposed legislation to codify in statute policy and procedure for commutation of sentence and the passing of Public Act 23-169 which expands parole eligibility to individuals who committed their crimes prior to age 21 and are otherwise ineligible for parole.

In the continued effort to provide ease of access to pertinent Board information, Chairperson Zaccagnini assigned the Board's Legislative & Administrative Advisor additionally to function as the Board's liaison for media and press inquiries. The Board's website now also includes a direct link for ease of access.

Planning, Research and Development Division

In Fiscal Year 2022/2023, the research division collaborated with other criminal justice agencies as part of the Criminal Justice Information Sharing (CJIS) team, on the continuous development of data exchange within the Criminal Information Sharing System (CISS) to create workflow for other agencies to obtain Pardons data as well as Clean Slate Legislation requirements from BOPP. The division also worked with the Mental Health subcommittee of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission, tasked with studying the incidence of chronic mental illness among Connecticut's incarcerated population. Additionally, in collaboration with the UCONN School of Public Policy and the Sentencing Commission, the unit is looking at Connecticut's Juvenile Release hearings under Public Act 15-84 and the long-term outcomes of those released as a result of these hearings.

While the Planning, Research and Development Division did not accept a new intern during this Fiscal Year, we did welcome back a former intern, who is currently working on her doctoral degree. She has spent the year focusing with us on hearings data analysis.

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 both houses of the General Assembly, and their terms are coterminous with the appointing Governor or until a successor is chosen, whichever is later. All members serve on both parole release panels and pardon release panels. The make-up of the Board for Fiscal Year 2022/2023 was as follows:

The Chairperson, Jennifer Medina Zaccagnini of Oakville appointed by Governor Lamont as Chairperson on April 10, 2023 (appointed Part-Time Board Member 05/27/2008 & Full-Time Board Member 05/13/14). As Chairperson, she serves as the Board's executive and administrative head.

Full-Time Parole Board Members: Joy Chance of Bloomfield (appointed 10/17/14); Stephen Dargan of West Haven (appointed 06/21/17); Carleton Giles of Milford (appointed as full-time board member September 2013, served as Board Chairperson from May 2014 until April 2023); Rufaro Page of Naugatuck (appointed 10/17/14); Michael Pohl of Manchester (appointed 5/8/19); Sergio Rodriguez of New Haven (appointed 2/28/2023); Deborah Smith Palmieri of Guilford (appointed Part-Time Board member 6/25/20 & Full-Time Board Member 2/9/22); Nancy Turner of Groton (appointed 06/21/17). *As of 6/30/2023 there were five (5) vacant Part-Time Board Member Positions, and one (1) Full-Time Board Member vacancy.*