

# 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 - 72 F/T & 15 P/T (allocated) - (9 F/T & 8 P/T vacancies as of 6/30/15)***

***Recurring operating expenses - 6,490,841 (adjusted 2015)***

***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.

In Fiscal year 2014/2015, the Board consisted of twenty (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**). It should be noted that in fiscal year 2015/2016, PA 15-2 will alter the membership of the Board from twenty (20) members to fifteen (15) by adding four (4) additional full-time members and eliminating nine (9) of the existing part-time members.

## **Public Service**

In 2014/2015, the Board of Pardons and Paroles reviewed a total of 4532 cases for parole consideration and 1103 applications for pardon consideration. Panels of the Board conducted

2976 hearings for the purposes of granting, rescinding or revoking parole and conducted 689 reviews resulting in the granting or denying of various types of pardons.

### ***Pardons Division***

In 2014/2015, the Pardons Division received a total of 1103 applications which constituted a 25% increase in applications received in fiscal year 2013/2014. Of those received, approximately 963 were deemed eligible for review (a 42% increase from the previous fiscal year) and 317 of these were granted either a Provisional/Certificate of Employability, Full or Conditional pardon. The overall pardons grant rate was 46% (a 2% increase 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

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

In 2014/2015, The Board conducted parole release hearings for 1981 offenders (an 11% increase 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. The Board also conducted 986 revocation and rescission reviews and/or hearings (a 3% decrease from the

previous fiscal year). Additionally, 772 cases were presented to the Board for designation as violent offenders (a 25% decrease compared to the previous fiscal year).

The Board may grant an offender 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 offenders 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 correctional facilities are available to answer questions from Department of Correction (DOC) personnel and offender regarding all aspects of the parole process.

Parole Officers initiate case summaries for all eligible offenders, identify violent offenders for 85% designation and gather all statutorily-mandated documentation. Parole Officers interview all 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 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 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. During a bifurcated hearing process, the Parole Officer develops a recommendation based on their finding of the conduct or new information and reviews with a panel of at least two Parole Board members who are present during the hearing. The panel makes the final decision regarding the revocation or rescission of parole and imposes disposition as it deems appropriate.

### **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 state, federal and immigration detainers. In 2014/2015, the unit processed a total of 212 transfer requests, accepted 136 cases from other jurisdictions and approved 155 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 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 2014/2015, the Division continued to be staffed with a parole officer devoting time to special projects, a staff psychologist and an Associate Research Analyst, all operating under the direction of a Director/Executive Director. The unit continues to assist with 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 2014-2015**

### ***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 to become effective 10/1/14. This act focused on the issuance a certificate of rehabilitation and now allows the Board of Pardons and Paroles (and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch - CSSD) to issue it to eligible offenders. These certificates, now labeled and referred to by both agencies as "certificates of employability" relieves an eligible offender of certain barriers to gaining employment or obtaining a credential, such as an occupational license, resulting from a criminal conviction. The board and CSSD worked collaboratively to implement this process effective 10/1/14. Effective 10/1/14, the Board established a separate application process and during the fiscal year received approximately 139 applications, granted 68 certificates and denied 18 applications. In April of 2015, three (3) new parole offers were hired and assigned to the pardons division.

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

The Board 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), which was the result of this collaboration, 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.

The Board began full scale implementation of SCORES assessments on 8/1/14 for every eligible offender being reviewed for parole. In October, the Governor appointed five (5) new Board members (3 full-time and 2 part-time) to the agency for the parole decision making process and they received extensive training on evidence-based practices in parole, Structured Decision-Making (SDM) process and SCORES. In December, the Division hosted dignitaries from the Republic of South Africa who came to the Board to study the Connecticut parole system. In April of 2015, nine (9) new parole officers were hired, trained and assigned to correctional institutions.

#### **Interstate Compact Unit**

In September of 2014, the Board of Pardons and Paroles in conjunction with the Department of Correction participated in a LEAN Event for the Interstate Process. The goal of the project was to reduce the amount of time it takes to review and process all Interstate Compact actions to make sure they are consistent with policy, Interstate Commission for Adult Supervision (ICOAS) rules and Connecticut statutes as well as, increase overall annual compliance audit rates. This project reviewed and leaned the process from initiation of a request to transfer an inmate all the way through completion/closeout of the request. *As a result* a streamlined process was created while increasing collaboration between Parole & Community Services ("PCS") and the Interstate Compact Unit. Additionally, the unit assumed the duties of all compact action requests/responses, progress reports, case closure notices, early termination reports, and any correspondences between states. This process has yielded a 95% or greater compliance rate in all categories on the ICAOS audit.

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

The Planning, Research and Development Division assisted in facilitating all agency training for new and existing staff including Structured Decision-Making (SDM), SCORES workshops, and headed up all quality assurance for the agency. Members of the division also represented the Board in the ongoing CISS (Criminal Justice Information Sharing System) project and Department of Corrections Offender Management Information System replacement project. The division is currently in collaboration with Carleton University to conduct a follow-up study to assess the utility of the SDM framework in predicting parole outcomes. The division also secured a continuing technical assistance grant for the agency from the National Parole Resource Center to work with the Center for Effective Public Policy on Strategic Planning for the next fiscal year. Lastly, members of the division were selected by the National Institute of

Corrections to become national trainers in the SDM framework and participated in a week long certification course in Washington D.C.

### **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. Full-time members, with the exception of the Chairperson, serve exclusively on parole release panels. Part-time members are appointed to serve exclusively on either parole release panels or pardon release panels.

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:** Ms. Rufaro Berry of Hamden (appointed 10/17/14), Ms. Joy Chance of Bloomfield (appointed 10/17/14), Mr. Kenneth Ireland of West Hartford (appointed 10/17/14), Mr. Robert Murphy of Madison, and Ms. Jennifer Zaccagnini of Watertown.

**Part-Time Parole Board Members:** Mr. Terry Borjeson of Newington (appointed 10/17/14), Ms. Patricia Camp of Bloomfield (appointed 10/17/14), Mr. David May of East Hampton; Ms. Pamela Richards of Ivoryton; and Ms. Kelly Smayda of Ellington. *As of 6/30/15, there were two (2) vacant part-time parole board member positions.*

**Part-Time Pardon Board Members:** Mr. Russell Palmer of Berlin (resigned 5/1/15), Mr. Joseph Milardo of Middletown; Mr. Nicholas Sabbetta of Burlington (resigned 6/8/15); Mr. Robert Smith of Southington; and Ms. Julia Wasserman of Sandy Hook. *As of 6/30/15, there were four (4) vacant part-time pardon board member positions.*