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: 64 F/T & 5 P/T (allocated) – 61 F/T Recurring
Operating Expenses: 5,515,870
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, 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 and provide relief to those individuals who have demonstrated the necessary life changes to become productive members of society.

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 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.

Public Service

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-2025, The Board of Pardons and Paroles reviewed 2,962 cases related to the parole process, and 2,032 applications for pardon consideration. Panels of the Board conducted 1,839 hearings for the purposes of granting, denying, rescinding, revoking parole or discharging someone from parole or special parole, and 1,583 reviews resulting in the granting or denying of various types of pardons.

In Fiscal Year 2024/2025, the Board increased Pardons Division staffing and implemented procedural changes to reduce the time it takes to go from completed application to pardon hearing by the Board. Another initiative in the Pardons Division involves adding an electronic system for commutation applications. Development of the e-Commutations path within the e-Pardons portal, will allow offenders and/or their legal representative the option to apply electronically for a commutation. Currently in the testing phase, once this process is complete the commutation process will be more efficient. Importantly too, the e-Commutation application process will enhance data collection and reporting for the Pardons Division.

FY 2024-2025 saw Governor Lamont appoint, and the Legislature confirm, three new Board Members, Robert Cizauskas, Aileen Keays and Alex Tsarkov. The addition of these three individuals completes the statutory staffing of full-time Board membership, and greatly supports the pivotal work of the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Pardons Division

The Pardons Division receives and reviews petitions for all forms of pardons, whether absolute or provisional, as well as applications for sentence commutation (clemency). Assigned Parole Officers review the applications and conduct the required investigations on each application. Once the required documentation is complete, Parole Officers prepare and distribute dockets for the Board.

The pardons process in Connecticut can help remove barriers to employment for various applicants. The Board may grant a Certificate of Employability (provisional pardon) 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 may mitigate the existence of a criminal history for those who do not receive or apply for an Absolute Pardon. Granting of an Absolute Pardon completely erases an individual's criminal record. This may increase employment opportunities for the individual since it removes the stigma of having a criminal record. 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 and commutation process is unique in that the granting authority rests with the Board, not the Governor. Individuals, who have completed their sentences (including parole and probation) and have demonstrated rehabilitation through pro-social, productive community engagement, if granted a pardon, will have the opportunity to move forward without the stigma of a criminal record.

In FY 2024-2025, the Pardons Division received 2,032 applications, a 2 % increase in applications from the previous fiscal year. Of those, 1,583 applicants met all criteria for Board review. In FY 24-25, the Board held 50 pardons hearing sessions. As a result, 1,377 individuals were granted either an Absolute Pardon or a Certificate of Employability (COE). The overall pardons grant rate during this period was 87%. During the fiscal year, 53 applicants were granted a Certificate of Employability (COE). Of the cases granted an Absolute Pardon, 616 were through the expedited pardon process. The expedited process is reserved for non-violent offenses.

During this fiscal year, the Pardons Division received 47 new applications for commutations. The Board held four (4) commutation sessions during which two (2) individuals were granted a commutation of some portion of their sentence.

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 about the laws and policies regarding parole release, calculation of time, general

conditions of release, supervision practices, revocation and rescission policies and panel hearings to newly sentenced, parole-eligible offenders. In accordance with the "Truth in Sentencing" law, the Board sets parole-eligibility dates at 85% of the sentence for those with violent offenses, and at 50% for non-violent offenders. Correctional facilities have one or more Parole Officer assigned to prepare inmate cases in advance of Board hearings, and these officers are available to answer questions from Department of Correction (DOC) personnel and the offenders regarding all aspects of the parole process.

Parole Officers prepare digital casefiles 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 scheduled parole hearing, during which the panel determines suitability for parole release. When an offender is granted discretionary parole, the 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 recommendations 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 the disposition it deems appropriate.

In FY 2024-2025, The Board conducted parole-related hearings for 1,353 individuals (a 14% decrease compared to the previous fiscal year). All hearings were conducted via video conference. The Board conducted 486 revocation and rescission reviews/hearings (a 7% 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 19 hearings for eligible individuals. Of those, 17 individuals were granted parole and two (2) individuals were denied parole. Similarly, in accordance with Public Act 23-169, "An Act Concerning Parole Eligibility for an Individual Serving a Lengthy Sentence for a Crime Committed before the Individual Reached the Age of Twenty-One and Criminal History Records Erasure," the Board conducted 42 hearings for eligible individuals. Of those, 27 individuals were granted parole, and 15 individuals were denied parole. Additionally, the Board conducted 193 Early Parole Discharge Reviews for individuals deemed eligible by statute. Of those, 57 individuals were found suitable, and Early Termination of Supervision was granted.

In FY 2024-2025, the Board received fewer requests for both Medical and Compassionate Parole than in the last fiscal year. There were no requests for Medical Parole during the fiscal year. Of the four (4) individuals who were deemed eligible for Compassionate Parole, the Board granted two (2) individuals compassionate release (a 33% decrease from the previous fiscal year).

Interstate Compact Unit

The Interstate Compact Unit works collectively with the Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision (ICAOS), whose membership includes paroling authorities across the nation. The role of the Interstate Compact Unit is to guide the transfer of offenders in a manner that promotes effective supervision strategies consistent with public safety, offender success/accountability, and crime

victims' rights. This unit similarly facilitates the transfer of supervision of offenders paroled to other states for supervision, as well as the transfer of supervision for offenders accepted by Connecticut from other states. Additionally, the Interstate Unit is responsible for the supervision and tracking of offenders who are granted Connecticut parole but who have state, federal, and immigration detainers in conjunction with their Connecticut sentence. In FY 2024-2025, the unit processed 149 transfer requests, accepted 77 cases from other jurisdictions and approved 72 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.

During FY 25, 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 2025 regular legislative session, served as an informational and technical resource to legislators and their constituents, and drafted proposed legislation in support of the Board.

In FY 25, the Division oversaw 21 federal and state lawsuits; revised and updated 3 existing policies; and created three new policies. 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 and Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities 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 to the public. The focus of the PRD Division is 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 Division 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 Framework" (SDMF).

The Planning, Research and Development Division consists of a Supervising Psychologist, Associate Research Analyst, and Research Analyst. In addition to assessment and consultation responsibilities, the Supervising Psychologist is the Board's liaison with psychologists and treatment providers within the DOC and in the community, provides ongoing training to Board members, and coordinates the extensive onboarding training for newly appointed Board members.

Victim Services

Victim Services at the Board consists of three (3) 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 are mandated by P.A. 08-01 and are funded by the Office of Victim Services.

Improvements/Achievements

Beyond the data reported in the previous section, and as detailed below, FY 2024-2025 provided multiple opportunities for the Board of Pardons and Paroles to enhance the efficacy and efficiency of the agency's work in service to its mission.

Pardons Division

Fiscal Year 2024/2025 brought continued growth and operational refinement to the Pardons Division. Two new staff members joined the division—a Records Specialist and a Parole Officer. The Records Specialist streamlined the front-end processing of applications, allowing for quicker assignment and movement through the system. The addition of the Parole Officer supports increased capacity for case processing within the division.

While the number of formal pardon hearings remained steady from the previous year, the division implemented a key procedural change in the handling of Expedited Reviews without a Hearing. By removing the applicant interview requirement, the Pardons Division reduced processing time and facilitated faster movement of eligible cases to the Board. As a result, 21% more cases were placed on dockets and agendas in May and June 2025 compared to the same period in the prior fiscal year, creating greater access to relief for qualified individuals.

Parole Hearings Division

In Fiscal Year 2024/2025, the Board continued its diligent commitment to adherence to best- practice guidelines through ongoing training. During this fiscal year, Board members have participated in multiple experiential trainings focusing on the evidence-based risk domains of the Structured Decision Making Framework (SDMF). Parole boards utilize this framework to analyze factors that contribute to specific risk domains, and when integrated with risk assessments, provide research-supported guidance in determining suitability for release to parole supervision. Board members also participated in an on-line SDMF training developed and sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections (NIC). In May, two Board members were selected to represent Connecticut at the Association of Paroling Authorities International Annual Training Conference, held in Atlanta, Georgia. While there, Board members participated in three days of training in support of best-practice considerations for young and older offenders, medical and compassionate parole applicants, victim considerations, addressing offenders' behavioral health issues, and the importance of tracking and interpreting data, among other topics.

Interstate Compact Unit

Connecticut's Interstate Parole Unit continues to operate as one of the top interstate units in the country, nationally recognized for outstanding compliance with regard to ICAOS (Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision) metric standards. Connecticut's notable compliance scores:

Progress Report Requests – **100.00%**
Request for Reporting Instructions Replies (state combined) – **100.00%**
Response to Violation Reports – **100.00%**
Transfer Request Replies – **98.9%**
Case Closure Notice Reply – **98.5%**

Each category listed is a representation of potential stages throughout a supervised person's period of Interstate supervision. Members of the Interstate Compact Parole Unit must complete each stage in a timely and thorough fashion. Compliance with these stages contributes to effective supervision of

the person, enhances public safety and measures agency accountability. Interstate Parole Officers effectively manage those cases connected to ICOTS, and all detainer cases granted parole by our agency.

The Interstate Unit has sought and received additional training from the DOC Parole and Community Services Division (DOC PCS). The Interstate Parole Officers join the DOC PCS trainings as part of the Waterbury District office. Discussions with DOC PCS also resulted in the decision to have BOPP Interstate Unit Officers attend PCS staff meetings to discuss the Interstate transfer process, required documents and address matters related to the supervision of Interstate cases. This will streamline the workflow between PCS and the BOPP Interstate Unit.

Planning, Research and Development Division

In FY 2024-2025, the Planning, Research and Development (PRD) Division made significant strides in advancing criminal justice practices and supporting the next generation of professionals. The team successfully supported the completion of the Digital Evidence report for the CJIS Digital Evidence Study-Steering Committee, providing a comprehensive analysis of sharing and storing digital evidence. The PRD division also continued to enhance the e-pardon system, making progress on the development of the commutation workflow. Throughout the year, the division consistently met its obligations for monthly and annual reporting and fulfilled various research and FOI requests. Data gathering and reporting to Core Correctional Solutions was also completed for Structured Decision Making analysis.

Continuing its commitment to education, the division hosted an intern from Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) in spring 2025. This collaboration provided a valuable, hands-on experience for a future criminal justice professional. The team also played a part in developing the Volunteer Internship Professional Handbook, helping to standardize and improve these vital programs

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 2024/2025 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.
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> **Full-Time Parole Board Members**: Rufaro Berry of Naugatuck (appointed 10/17/14); Joy Chance of Bloomfield (appointed 10/17/14); Robert Cizauskas of Middlebury (appointed 08/08/2024); Aileen Keays of Farmington (nominated/appointed 04/01/2025); 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); Alex Tsarkov of Hartford (nominated/appointed 04/01/2025); Nancy Turner of Groton (appointed 06/21/17). *As of 6/30/2025 there were five (5) vacant Part-Time Board Member Positions.*