

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: 5,805,266

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 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) 2023/2024, The Board of Pardons and Paroles reviewed 2,845 cases related to the parole process, and 1,986 applications for pardon consideration. Panels of the Board conducted 2,093 hearings for the purposes of granting, denying, rescinding, revoking parole or discharging someone from parole or special parole, and 1,267 reviews resulting in the granting or denying of various types of pardons.

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

and conduct investigations on each application, which include criminal records queries and interviews with witnesses and victims. When all required documentation has been obtained and application has been deemed complete, Parole Officers prepare and distribute dockets. 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.

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. Granting of an Absolute Pardon may increase employment opportunities for the individual since the stigma of having a criminal record is removed. Certificates of Employability may mitigate the existence of a criminal history for those who do not receive or apply for an Absolute 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 and commutation process is unique in that the granting authority rests with a Board, not the Governor. Persons who have completed their sentences (including parole and probation,) and have demonstrated rehabilitation through pro-social, productive community engagement have the opportunity to do so without the stigma of a criminal record.

In FY 2023-2024, the Pardons Division received 1,986 applications, a 10% decrease in applications from the previous FY. Of those, 1,267 applicants met all criteria for Board review, and were accordingly assigned to pre-screen, expedited review, or full hearing dockets. In FY 2023-2024, the Board held 48 pardons hearing sessions. Throughout the fiscal year, 1,126 individuals were granted either a Full/Absolute Pardon or a Certificate of Employability (COE). Of the cases granted an Absolute Pardon, 497 were through the expedited pardon process. The overall pardons grant rate during this period was 87%. During the fiscal year, 29 applicants were granted a Certificate of Employability (COE).

During this fiscal year, the Pardons Division received 92 new applications for commutations. The Board met for five (5) commutation sessions, and during FY 2023/2024, nine (9) individuals were granted commutations.

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 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 (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 (FY) 2023-2024, The Board conducted parole-related hearings for 1,570 individuals (a 25% decrease compared to the previous FY). All hearings were conducted via video conference. The Board conducted 523 revocation and rescission reviews/hearings (a 3% decrease from the previous FY). 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 18 hearings for eligible individuals. Of those, 12 individuals were granted parole and six (6) individuals were denied parole. Additionally, the Board conducted 152 Early Parole Discharge Reviews for individuals deemed eligible by statute. Of those, 122 individuals were found suitable, and Early Termination of Supervision was granted.

In FY 2023-2024, the Board received fewer requests for both Medical and Compassionate Parole. Of the eight (8) individuals who were deemed eligible for Medical or Compassionate Parole, the Board granted three (3) individuals compassionate release (a 50% increase from the previous FY) and four (4) individuals medical release (a 300% increase from the previous FY).

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 2023/2024, the unit processed a total of 140 transfer requests, accepted 74 cases from other jurisdictions and approved 65 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 24, 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 2024 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 24, the Division oversaw 21 federal and state lawsuits; revised and updated 9 existing policies; created 2 new policies; and developed and provided training for Hearing Examiners. 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 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).

The Planning, Research and Development Division consists of a Supervising Staff Psychologist, Associate Research Analyst, and Research Analyst. In addition to assessment and consultation responsibilities, the Supervising Staff Psychologist provides ongoing training to Board members, and coordinates the extensive onboarding training to 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 were mandated by P.A. 08-01 and are funded by the Office of Victim Services.

Improvements/Achievements

In Fiscal Year 2023/2024, the Board of Pardons and Paroles continued to use a virtual platform that hosts all parole, commutation and pardon hearings. With the addition of a staff Media Production Technician in the previous fiscal year, this virtual platform improved efficiency, training and communication between facilities and the Board offices, allowing ease of access for participating sites, parole and pardon applicants, and victims. The dedicated staff person and system enhancements together improve access allowing members of the public to observe hearings conveniently through the BOPP website.

Pardons Division

After several years of significant changes to the pardons process, and within the pardons unit itself, Fiscal Year 2023/2024 saw important division stability. There were 48 pardon sessions in FY 2023/2024, a 30% increase over the previous fiscal year. While the number of applications for Absolute Pardon decreased during the year, a 66% increase in applications for Certificate of Employability resulted in 29 individuals holding improved opportunity for employment and thus stability in the community. The Pardons Division added three new parole officers during the fiscal year, and staffing shifts within the division has factored in improved processing of cases, allowing for the overall increase in pardon hearings in 2024.

Parole Hearings Division

In Fiscal Year 2023/2024, the Board continued its diligent commitment to adherence to evidence-based best practice through ongoing training. Monthly Board in-service training opportunities are coordinated by the Board's Supervising Psychologist, with trainings provided by the psychologist, the Planning, Research and Development, and invited experts in the fields of assessment, rehabilitation and supervision. In October 2023, The Chairperson, Executive Director, Supervising Staff Psychologist, Board Members and many BOPP staff members attended the NECCD (New England Council on Crime & Delinquency) conference in Mystic, CT. In May 2024, the Supervising Staff Psychologist and a member of the Planning, Research and Development Unit attended the APAI (Association of Paroling Authorities International) conference in Seattle, WA. In the spring of 2024, Cynthia Mausser J.D. from the Center of Effective Public Policy provided training for the Board Members focused on best-practice research related to risk-relevant supervision conditions.

Interstate Compact Unit

Connecticut's Interstate Parole Unit continues to operate as one of the top interstate units in the country. During FY 2023/2024, the Interstate Parole Unit was recognized for achieving a score of 100-percent (100%) in five of the six Compliance Standard Performance Metrics, surpassing the National average in each category. Those categories include Case Closure Reply Compliance, Requested Progress Report Compliance, Request for Reporting Instruction Reply Compliance, Transfer Reply Compliance, and Violation Response Compliance. 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.

In an effort to streamline training for the Interstate Parole Officers, we have partnered with the Parole and Community Services Fugitive Investigation Unit to receive added training in the areas of offender management, custody based scenarios, and extradition procedures when returning a CT offender back to the Department of Correction. Additional trainings will be ongoing in an effort to provide continuous education and familiarity with the important task of maintaining public safety, officer safety and offender safety.

Legal and Legislative Division

During the 2023/2024 legislative session, 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 provided that said crime(s) was committed on or before October 1, 2005, and the sentence was imposed on or before October 1, 2005.

Planning, Research and Development Division

In FY 2023-2024, the Planning, Research and Development Division played a pivotal role in enhancing data sharing within the criminal justice system. As members of the Criminal Justice Information Sharing (CJIS) team, the team collaborated with other agencies to develop data exchange workflows in the Criminal Information Sharing System (CISS). This included facilitating the implementation of Clean Slate Legislation, as it pertained to the Board of Pardons and Paroles. The Research team's expertise was instrumental in identifying and resolving critical errors in the Clean Slate workflow across multiple criminal justice-related information systems.

To address the growing importance of digital evidence, the Division participated in the CJS Digital Evidence Study-Steering Committee, and contributed to the development of strategies for sharing and storing digital evidence. Additionally, attendance at the Association of Paroling Authorities International (APAI) conference in May 2024 provided valuable insights into industry best practices.

The Division also prioritized and invested in experiential education, information and data sharing, and personal/professional development of future criminal justice professionals. The team hosted an undergraduate summer intern from a Connecticut state college, providing unique, informative, fulfilling, and hands-on experience both at the Board and in the Department of Correction (DOC). They also supported and assisted with a former intern, turned PhD candidate's doctoral research on program effectiveness and long-term community success. That individual successfully defended their dissertation on that research in June 2024, and they have taken their training and doctorate to a new position in a corrections setting.

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 2023/2024 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 to April 2023, and as full-time board member from April 2023 to October 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 6/30/2024 there were five (5) vacant Part-Time Board Member Positions, and two (2) Full-Time Board Member vacancies.*