

You're Meeting with the
Michigan Parole Board

... What Next?

Tips and Guidance
from your friends at

HFP

Humanity
for Prisoners
Action with Compassion

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Please note there are places in this document where you'll see notes distinguishing a parole interview from a parole hearing. You will also see the word *interview* used to reference the Q&A process by which someone is asking you a question and you're providing an answer. The more generic use of the word interview (Q&A) applies to both parole hearings as well as parole interviews.

INTRODUCTION

Humanity for Prisoners has spent over 15 years providing compassionate services to Michigan prisoners. We've provided personal representatives at the Parole Board reviews, and we've testified at numerous public hearings and interviews. We are often asked for advice on how to best prepare for an interaction with the Parole Board. Based on our years of advocacy, interviews with other prisoner advocates, reading affidavits of MDOC employees explaining parole specifics, and in speaking with a people from MDOC, the legislature, other prisoners, and Parole Board, we have pulled together this guide. It is designed to help you do what you can to have the most positive experience possible.

As we are all well aware, there is no concrete proof of exactly what works. There is no proven formula for living your own good life with purpose and meaning in a way that you can "prove" to anyone else. There is no fool-proof way to demonstrate remorse and empathy and ownership. There is nothing you can offer by way of indisputable evidence that you will not commit another crime. But *doing good time*, making your own life the kind of life you can feel good about and finding a way of being that provides purpose and meaning will be your own tasks to do for your own benefit. We hope to provide you with advice for representing yourself in the best light. This booklet assumes you have taken steps already to do your time with the highest character possible, minimizing any misconducts, maximizing every learning opportunity, etc. It is designed to help you share that journey and experience using informed advice and our best intentions for your success in your hearing or interview and in returning home.

As you read this and as you prepare, please do so knowing we are not legal consultants. We are just providers of compassionate support and services for Michigan inmates. This guide will cover topics over which we believe you have control. You can read about Parole Board requirements, notifications, and process-related items elsewhere. We've listed a few references and resources on the last page where you can find more information.

Any kind of interview can be stressful. Being interviewed by the Parole Board (and for hearings, also by the Assistant Attorney General) is no exception. We hope the information here helps you with developing personal confidence and equipping you to show up as your highest and best version of yourself. Taking the time to focus on feeling and being prepared is the first step to doing that.

Peace and good luck!

- Your friends at Humanity for Prisoners

WHAT TO EXPECT

HEARINGS: In our experience, the Parole Board members (one to three) and Assistant Attorney General will spend 90 minutes or more of a typical hearing on what happened during your crime(s) and anything else previously on record, even juvenile offenses. You are not allowed legal representation but may have as many guests as you like if it is a public hearing. Not all parole hearings are public. Your notice will be sent directly to you and you will know then.

INTERVIEWS: Parole eligibility interviews can happen under two circumstances: (1) 5 to 8 months prior to ERD (your earliest release date), or (2) for Lifers with parole eligibility at 10 years or at 15 years depending on the date of the offense, 17.5 to 20 years under Parole Board jurisdiction (or Parole Board jurisdiction as determined by the Records office if serving a Life sentence and a concurrent term of years or a Life sentence and a consecutive term of years).

For circumstance (1) above, the three-member PB Panel decides. For circumstance (2), the Parole Board Member assigned to the case decides whether to conduct an interview. The interviews are not as lengthy, up to 45 minutes, sometimes closer to 10 or 15 minutes; and because of that may not go into as much depth as a hearing. The AAG will not be present, typically only one PB member and you are allowed one representative or guest.

After the interview, if the PB Member feels the case has merit, then they will present it in executive session. If a majority of the Parole Board has interest to proceed to a public hearing and requires a majority vote of the entire PB. All cases involving a life sentence must be decided by a majority vote of the full parole board – at least 6 to 4 in favor. Even a 50/50 vote = a continuance, also known as a flop.

CONTINUANCES: A continuance for circumstance (1) varies and is communicated by the PB's decision. A continuance for situation (2) means five years before seeing the PB again. When a continuance is issued, you begin serving in on your official eligibility date, not on the date you are seen for a parole consideration interview nor the date the parole decision is issued.

Your interview or hearing will most likely go through the list of items below. You can be sure the bold items will be covered. The facts and circumstances surrounding the offense for which you are incarcerated, previous incidents, as well as your institutional conduct, are significant factors the Parole Board will consider when considering whether to release you on parole. You will want to be prepared to speak to/about the other items if you are asked about them or if you want to bring them up, but there will likely not be time for them all.

- **Facts of the crime (usually in a ton of detail) and other criminal history**
- **Institutional behavior and conduct**
- **Final Statement**
You will be asked if you have anything final to say. You will want to give this some serious thought and preparation, as it is your last chance to say anything you want the Parole Board to consider. This should, again, be authentic and unique to you. No matter your uniqueness's, you will want to take the opportunity to, once more, stress how you genuinely feel about the crime(s) and victim(s) today. You do not want to say you deserve it or you have done enough time.
- Programming (any/all programming - vocational, educational, life skills, literacy, etc.)
 - Programming required to complete.
 - Other programming accomplishments and insights you've gained as a result.
 - If available at your facility, get involved in a pre-release program.
- Treatment (sex offender, drug and alcohol, mental health)
 - You will want to address what you've done inside as well as what you've arranged post-release for treatment.
- Physical, mental, and medical history
- History of family violence
- Input from others – victim, judge, prosecuting attorney, warden, DOC staff.
- Re-entry planning/future plans. You'll want to have a detailed plan for the following areas:
 - How to get documents you'll need post-release (identification, social security card, etc.)
 - Accommodations/living arrangements/suitable home plan.
 - Financial plan/job plan/earning a living.
 - Educational or vocational training
 - Friends/family/companions/social network for support
 - Alcohol/drug/offender programs on the outside
- **General Character**
While you respond to their questions, the Parole Board will be listening to your statements and replies with an ear for understanding your general character, including:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Remorse ▪ Empathy ▪ Responsibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pro or anti-social values ▪ Criminal thinking/criminal intent ▪ Propensity for engaging in future criminal activity.
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**Proof of these qualities should not come in the form of a statement declaring to have these qualities, but rather it should flow or become evident during the course of the interview. (*Show don't tell.*)

IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

REMORSE, EMPATHY, AND RESPONSIBILITY are incredibly important to the Parole Board. Take a moment to step into their shoes and consider it from their perspective. Using written records and this interaction with you they are trying to assess whether they can feel confident in your success on the outside, that they can sleep well at night if they advocate for a release, that you are not going to cause harm, that you are going to be a good person on the outside. It can be a challenging position for them. You can see how critical it is that all your responses give them peace of mind and assurance that you will not re-offend. Show them how you have grown intellectually and broadened and deepened your own humanity. Your journey will be unique to you. If you insist that you did not commit the crime, at least show sadness for the results and sympathy for the victims. Your feelings here are critical.

What is meant by **remorse**? Remorse is a deep regret or guilt for a wrong committed. The world needs to know not just how sorry you are, but how you are deeply regretful for the crime and impact of the crime on others. You want to express this in a way that genuinely demonstrates insight without excuse making. "I was young and dumb." Yeah, but there was something else to it. Dive into specifically why you have sorrow for doing what you did. The assumption is that your regret and remorse should be high enough to serve as a deterrent – you will not want to engage in repeated criminal activity that would cause you to have the unwanted sorrow or regret again. On the other hand, if a person demonstrates an inability to feel appropriate sorrow or regret for having committed an offense, if they are not pointedly sorry for their crime, blames others, makes excuses, etc. then it could be argued that this person would have a greater disposition and likelihood to commit a similar crime in the future should the same factors that motivated him/her exist once again. Based on this, ask yourself:

- What is my level of remorse? What makes me sorry? Where does my regret come from?
- How do I authentically and clearly convey it?
- What are some specific ways I can demonstrate (*show don't tell*) my level of remorse to the board?

What is meant by **empathy**? Empathy is a quality which helps the interviewer determine if an offender understands the total extent of harm that he/she has caused a victim or in many cases to society itself. If an offender is unable to visualize and understand this harm to a great degree, then it can be argued

that s/he does not see the harm and risks reoffending. Lack of empathy is a hallmark feature of psychopathy and so people who cannot demonstrate empathy are not going to instill confidence in their ability to change and live a pro-social and crime-free lifestyle. Based on this, ask yourself and prepare to show the Parole Board:

- How have I been able to place myself in the shoes of my victim(s)?
- What is my level of understanding of the harm I caused? And how do I talk about this with others?
- How did my actions alter the lives of others?
- How do I now relate to the suffering my crime(s) have caused others?

What is meant by **responsibility**? This is the more obvious one. The level of responsibility you assume sends a strong message to the listener/observer about your understanding of the harm caused. Minimizing responsibility, shifting blame, holding grudges, denying involvement, or not having a complete understanding of the harm caused, and your role in causing it, can have a negative effect and suggest higher risk of recidivism. Anything that reduces (or increases) the risk of re-offending is an important consideration for parole. Questions you want to be able to have answers to include:

- What was my role in the harm I caused?
- How have I been/was I at fault?
- What conscious decisions did I make that led to the crime being committed?
- What could/should I have controlled to prevent it from happening?

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES - MAINTAINING COMPOSURE

Different people use different methods of interviewing, and you will want to get comfortable knowing what to expect and being prepared to reply thoughtfully.

A great way to prepare for the various styles of interview is to find a buddy and practice. Have them act as each kind of interviewer we describe here and have them give you feedback on your responses, considering tone, body language, eye contact, and the content of your response (e.g., maturity, remorse, empathy, responsibility, reassurance you will not reoffend, etc.).

Note to your friend: don't loosen up or lighten up! Stay in character. Ask five "why's" to help get to the core. (Ex: Why did you do that? [answer] Why did you do *that*? [answer] Why was that? [answer] Why ...? [answer] Why ...? [answer]) The harder you make the mock-interview, the better prepared your friend will be to deal with the real-life situations that might arise during their hearing/interview and avoid a flop.

Interviewer Type A The Timeliner	Interviewer Type B The Antagonizer	Interviewer Type C The Curve Ball
<p>Interview approach: This interviewer may take a methodical or linear approach asking about your background in chronological order, starting way back where your first problem with the law began.</p> <p>Your response: Be patient and thoughtful. Answer every question concisely while being as thorough as possible. Try to stay on track. Sometimes it is easy to get into things not asked. Beware of this "reminiscing". Stay focused on only the question at hand. Provide as much detail as you're able. If you don't remember something, it is okay to say so. It can sometimes be easy to try and fill in the blanks because you want to be forthright. Try to avoid this pitfall. Avoid guessing or filling in blanks if you're not certain of the detail. Share what parts you do recall with certainty, and which parts you may be fuzzy on. It is okay to say you aren't sure and explain you don't want to provide anything but the truth using your best recall.</p> <p>Note: while you want to be heard as honest, this is a place where you don't need to tell anyone you're being honest. Just simply <i>be</i> honest. Try to avoid qualifying statements such as, "... to the best of my recollection ..." or "... to tell you the truth ..." These statements may diminish the general feeling of "truthiness" to your comments.</p> <p>It may help to take some prep time to revisit each incident/topic you anticipate might come up and journal about them ahead of time. Doing so may help jog your memory as completely as possible about what you do remember. The more preparation, the better.</p>	<p>Interview approach: This interviewer may use a more aggressive technique to see how you handle pressure. They may badger you about details. They may overstate the facts of the crime. They may ask you the same question repeatedly in different ways. And they may challenge the information you have provided.</p> <p>Your response: Be patient and thoughtful. Don't let anyone frustrate you. Don't let your emotions get the better of you. Maintain a level of calm and professionalism. Answer each question completely while also being concise. Take your time to be straightforward, honest, and direct.</p> <p>Remember to relax. You want to be confident and your brain to think clearly, so you must be as relaxed as possible. This is of course the opposite of how you will most likely be feeling, so you must intentionally take steps to create relaxing effects. Take a few slow deep breaths – this relaxes the body and the mind. Keep your facial expressions neutral or positive. Silently affirm yourself by thinking, "I can do this."</p> <p>Note: In most if not all situations, you can expect the AAG to play this part. Don't be taken by surprise by an aggressive or combative demeanor.</p>	<p>Interview approach: Yet another interviewer may spring a question (or several) on you that seems like it came out of the blue and isn't relatable at all. This is when you'll want to show how you calmly and rationally think on your feet.</p> <p>Your response: It is okay to ask a clarifying question or ask the interviewer to repeat the question. It is also okay to take a moment to consider your answer to a question that seems out of the blue. Think first about what it is that you want to convey and then build a brief and direct response getting at that.</p> <p>This is a great time to really listen. Often when we are in a stressful situation with a lot going on in our heads, we may not stop to hear the actual question or concern of the speaker due to nerves. To make sure you understand the question and give the appropriate answer, focus on the other person. Look at him or her directly in the eyes. Hear exactly what is being spoken. This shows attentiveness, prevents distraction, and increases comprehension. And as always, reply as thoughtfully, calmly, honestly, and completely as possible.</p>

INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES – GENERAL TIPS

KEEP YOURSELF ON TRACK USING PATIENCE AND STRUCTURE

In addition to anxiety, we can sometimes go blank because so many thoughts begin to go through our minds at once. While this is unavoidable, you can avoid verbalizing that stream of consciousness. Doing so will lead to rambling. The interviewer will generally not want or expect you to give a speech or full history on the subject. Instead, they're usually looking for something specific - a clear concise answer with just enough supporting information to satisfy their concern. Practice using a structure - a guideline to developing replies. This can help you maintain focus,

avoid going blank, and stay on topic. Try to limit yourself to no more than two key points. And any point you make should have one statement of evidence to that effect. Wrap up your response with a quick summary statement and stop. Often, a brief period of silence will follow as the interviewer is probably taking notes or simply processing what you said. Resist the urge to fill this silence with more information. If you start up again with more details, you may end up causing confusion, belaboring the point, or opening a can of worms, as they say.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT

Your interviewers will often begin the process by stressing honesty. It can be tempting to avoid talking about your own shortcomings because you want to make a good impression. Think ahead of time about what yours are and plan how you'd like to address them. This allows you to avoid being put on the spot and allows you to demonstrate some vulnerability and authenticity by being honest about where you know you still need to focus and grow. Have you received targeted recommendations for areas to improve in the past? Talk about your successes and failures. Be able to speak to what you've done to own it and avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

FEAR ABOUT THE FUTURE IS REASONABLE AND EXPECTED

Especially for individuals who have been incarcerated a long time, the Parole Board will want to know candidly what you're going to struggle with as you adjust to a successful life in the free world. Give yourself preparation time to explore all of the areas that may be difficult and cause you anxiety or fear should you be released. The board will be looking for honesty and thoughtfully put-together reassurances from you that you have a plan for success, for mitigating the risk of failure, and for getting support when you need it.

WHAT ABOUT MISCONDUCTS?

Obviously, avoid them. (Others have done it. You can too.) This is another area that can trip you up if you're not prepared to address them. Remember, your way of being day to day on the inside demonstrates to the Parole Board how you will live your life on the outside. You will often be required to explain misconducts, particularly those of a more serious level and probably in a fair amount of detail the same way you will be asked to delve into a high level of detail about any crimes committed.

If you are violating prison rules and receiving misconducts, think about the circumstances and the choices you are making that lead up to that. Consider your behavior, your daily life choices and the long-term impact and consequences for not only you, but for the folks who care about you. You may also want to think about the way your decisions on the inside could be applied to something relatable on the outside. (For example: an employment situation with an offensive coworker, or a conflict with an unpleasant neighbor who hollers at you every time she sees you about where you put your garbage can).

Be prepared to review any misconducts incurred in the last five years. It is not typical to dive into misconducts that are not major, but it may come up, so just be prepared. The Parole Board does use your institutional conduct record as part of their evaluation process. You will want to be able to address the following:

- If you've avoided misconducts, what choices and changes did you make to be rule-abiding and stay out of trouble? Show the board how you've adjusted your thought processes, decision-making, and resulting life-choices to impact more positive/productive behavior.
- If you have received misconducts and need to address them with the board, use the "remorse, empathy, and responsibility" section of this packet to shape and inform how you will speak about what you've done in a way that can explain (not excuse) and demonstrate (show not tell) that you are capable of following rules, controlling your behavior, and have developed good, life-long habits in doing so.

Keep in mind the following: If something is not my fault, then I cannot control it or prevent it from happening again in the future. If you are going to show that you've changed, then you must be able to admit that you've made conscious decisions that lead to outcomes. You must be able to show that you can exercise control over your decisions and behaviors so that negative outcomes and consequences do not occur.

SHOW DON'T TELL

It is so important that pro-social qualities and characteristics are evident in your responses. You may wonder, "What do you mean by *show*?" or "How do I do that?" It can be a tricky distinction. Allow the interviewer to see you've changed (using examples of "how"), don't just tell them ("Believe me, I've changed" with no supporting evidence of it). Show them through examples of actions and real-life experiences that demonstrate and illustrate your changes. Tell them what inspired the changes you've experienced. Simply telling someone about your qualities and characteristics isn't very convincing. Anyone can say they've changed. Research suggests that for recidivism to be reduced, there needs to be an experience where you see you've made a mistake, feel a need to change, and have been able to make that change. So, show them using your own story and examples. Particularly as it relates to the crime for which you've been incarcerated as well as any previous criminal history,

think about what life-events and examples you can talk about to show the Parole Board what insights you've gained, why the changes happened, and what kind of person you are now.

VIDEO-CONFERENCING

A Parole Interview may be in person, or it may be by video conference. The main difference is that you cannot see the body language or small changes in facial expressions of the person(s) asking the questions if you're not in the room with them. It may feel odd and even a little bit isolating. While this can certainly feel more difficult because you cannot read the person's reactions, stay focused on all of your preparation, and put your best foot forward. To minimize feeling unprepared, spend some time visualizing how you'll present yourself and how you'll be if your interview is by video, and you cannot rely on observing your interviewer's reactions or expressions when they're asking you a question. Your own body language, appearance, and eye contact are all still very important.

Here are a few tips for a successful video interview:

- Look your best physically.
- Look into the camera ... this is your "eye contact".
- Sit tilted just a little bit forward to show you are engaged and attentive.
- Try to control fidgeting or other nervous energy.
- Be conscious about your own facial expression (it is easy to look away, look disinterested, etc. when the human you're speaking to isn't in the room). Wear a positive expression and maintain "eye contact" even when there aren't any eyes necessarily looking back at you.
- Speaking clearly is especially important as audio isn't guaranteed to be high quality.
- Practice! Have your interview buddy practice interviewing you while facing the wall. As you do this, stay aware of the content of your responses as well as your physical presence.

GUEST CONSIDERATIONS AND SUPPORT

For anyone who is interested in speaking on your behalf at your interview or public hearing, you may want to give them a heads up on what to expect. Here are some things for you to think about plus a few considerations you may choose to review with folks who plan on supporting you as part of the interview or hearing process:

WHO

For Interviews, your representative cannot be another prisoner or an attorney. For Public Hearings, an attorney can be there as a person speaking on your behalf, but they cannot be there under the guise of legal representation. You are not allowed legal representation in either format. Be sure to select a person you are comfortable being 100% honest in front of. The Parole Board expects complete honesty and sometimes it is hard to come to terms with all the difficult details of a crime with your mom or your spouse sitting beside you. Be careful to choose someone you will feel safe being vulnerable with exposing everything in your past. It is very human to want to gloss over difficult details. You may feel you're being protective. You may worry they'll think less of you. All kinds of things like that can creep up. Don't let those dynamics get in the way of a successful interview.

SECURITY

There will be a checkpoint similar to what a person may see/experience at an airport. At the discretion of the MDOC staff and/or the Warden ...

- They will pass through a metal detector and/or wanded
- They may be required to take their shoes and socks off
- They can be denied access and attendance because of safety concerns, but also based simply on being a perceived threat to a smooth process
- They may be subjected to a pat-down or search
- Their hand may be marked
- There are no recordings or photos allowed
- Allowed personal items will be limited. They should plan to leave whatever they can at home or secured in their vehicle including purse/wallet, phone, camera, and any food including gum.

CAN'T BE THERE?

Letters of support are very effective. Letters should be direct and to-the-point. Letters can address any/all of the positive changes they've seen in you during your years of incarceration. What is even more effective, however, are letters from these folks outlining what kind of support they are willing to provide you with upon release. An example of this would be a letter from a sibling who agrees to let you stay at their home (shows support network in a critical area) for up to 9 months (specific time period) as long as (conditions for the agreement) you are seeking

employment or going to school and contributing to the household chores. Advise your support network to send their letters to the Parole Board ahead of time and provide you with one copy as well in case it doesn't get filed in time.

SPEAKING

For public hearings, let your loved ones know that you will either already be seated or will be escorted into the room. They should not address anyone directly in the room until it is their turn to speak which will be allowed at the end, typically for 3 to 5 minutes each. There may be both people in support of as well as in opposition to your release. Everyone will be given an opportunity to speak. You may want to remind the folks there to support you of the same guidelines we are addressing in this booklet: advise them not to minimize your crime(s) or make any excuses. The best way they can show up for you in the hearing is to demonstrate their current and future support of you should you receive a positive outcome and get granted parole/release. For interviews, the individual will be with you in a room as you are interviewed by video conference. They will also be asked to contribute at the end.

PREPARING DOCUMENTATION

While parts of this section are aimed at the Parole Interviews, the information is valuable to anyone preparing to meet with the Parole Board in any circumstance. Even if your situation may lead to a Public Hearing, we suggest you review these points as some of them may relate to you as well.

PROCESS

Per the MDOC: Normally, the prisoner first comes to the attention of the Parole Board as s/he nears the end of the minimum term imposed by the court. The date of parole eligibility is often called the Earliest Release Date (ERD). Approximately 5 to 8 months prior to the parole eligibility date, a Parole Eligibility Report is prepared, and the prisoner will be scheduled for consideration by the Board (e.g., the Lifer Interview).

The Board considers many factors to determine whether parole should be granted. State law holds that "The parole decision is made by majority vote of a three-member panel of the Board. If granted a parole, the prisoner is allowed to return to the community under the supervision of a Parole Agent for a specified term. The release is conditioned upon the parolee's compliance with terms set by the Parole Board."

PAROLE ELIGIBILITY REPORT (PER)

The Parole Eligibility Report is the report generated before meeting with the Parole Board. This report is prepared at the facility with CFA (prison facility administration) versus FOA (field operations administration which the Parole Board is a part of).

Typically, the ARUS and/or ARUM will sit down with you several months before your early release date. You will work with this person collaboratively to prepare the documents that will be contained in your PER. You will be interviewed by this person as part of the PER development process. This interview and your interactions with this person are very important. Their report will be used as a starting point for the Parole Board members reviewing your situation. You will want to do everything you can to ensure you build a good rapport with the interviewer and work closely with him/her to build the most complete and accurate PER possible.

The PER is expected to include several things – risk assessment scores (COMPAS – general idea of recidivism, high/medium/low; SASSI – substance abuse; VPP – violence prevention), placement-parole plan, programming, self-help, jobs, work reports, block reports, tickets, security level changes, etc.

It is important, like your PSI before sentencing, to be familiar with your own PER, know what's in there, add anything you want to be seen by the Parole Board, agree to what's being shown and be okay with it.

OTHER DOCS

Take the time to organize. Ensure documentation you want to include are relevant/offer evidence of relevant topics such as future support, good work record, etc. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- If your PER or parole guideline score sheet is incomplete or inaccurate, bring documents that will fill in the gaps or correct possible inaccuracies.
- If you haven't already, build a list of programs you've participated *plus* records of any programs you have requested to be in and for which you were either denied or wait-listed. Don't bring all certificates of completion.
- Copies of letters of support (ex: job offers, home offers, personal support)
- Your latest psychological report.
- A fully detailed Offender Relapse Prevention Plan
- Crime Impact Statement
- Employment plan
- Education or vocational training plan

- Community placement or housing plan
- Transportation plan

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Today's 10 Parole Board members are appointed by the Director of the MDOC.

NON-PAROLABLE LIFE SENTENCES

Non-parolable life sentences require commutation by the governor. According to the MDOC website, looking at the last 30 years there has been an average of 8.2 prisoners per year, serving life sentences, who have been released through the lifer law or commutation process.

A medical commutation case comes to the Parole Board's attention through the Bureau of Healthcare. A regular commutation is initiated by you or someone in the community on your behalf. Humanity for Prisoner's assists people with this process. Contact us if you have questions or would like support.

THE ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL AND THE PAROLE BOARD HEARING

The AAG is statutorily required to be at all public hearings with the Parole Board. This section is based purely on our opinions and observations of those interactions. Our staff's point of view may be incorrect in terms of broader or longer-term application, and we also feel what we share below is accurate in terms of the exposure we've had. At the risk of being wrong, we feel it is important enough and common enough to address those points of view here in the spirit of best preparing you for what to expect.

The AAG plays a prosecutorial role in the process versus the Parole Board members who use their time with you in the interview primarily as attentive, thorough, and careful information gatherers.

Because of this role, the AAG's tone can sound accusatory and/or condescending at times. From what we can tell in general, the Parole Board is not greatly affected by anything the AAG does or says when s/he is being difficult. The PB is really looking for truthfulness, acceptance of what you've done, the impact you had, and for any evidence to demonstrate you won't cause harm again.

Our experience with the current AAG has demonstrated his typical behavior to be antagonistic and contentious with prisoners. We can only assume he believes that kind of approach will somehow best serve the people of Michigan (all of us), for whom it is his job to represent.

Our best advice to you is to remain calm and unaffected and know that it isn't personal when the AAG's behavior feels potentially hostile toward you and possibly toward the people there to support you. You can almost guarantee it happens every time. It's not you.

INNOCENCE

For people claiming innocence, this is a harder process because the way you talk about the "crime" doesn't necessarily apply. Don't be discouraged by that. You will need to make sure your story is consistent and clear. Be mindful of the need to take full responsibility for what things you did do and be able to address those things thoroughly. In all cases, but especially with claiming innocence, TRUTH and CLARITY are incredibly important.

FINAL THOUGHTS

SUMMARY

Whether you're in a Parole Interview or Public Hearing, you want to show the Parole Board you will be successful on the outside. You can do this by demonstrating you take responsibility for your life choices and can genuinely own those choices by explaining the following:

Sorrow and remorse for the harm you caused the victim.

Full comprehension of the impact on the victim, empathy for what you put them through, and for the harm you caused the victim's family and/or community.

A clear understanding of why you engaged in the criminal conduct in the first place, and how you have come to understand why you did what you did

Evidence that you have changed, showing that the chances of committing another similar crime are zero.

A clear statement taking full responsibility for what you did, including having put yourself in the situation where criminal conduct was likely to occur that is, not minimizing your conduct in the crime, but instead taking full responsibility for what you (and, if relevant, your codefendants) did, without blaming drugs, or alcohol, or the situation, or others/ .

COMMUNICATING OUTCOMES

Letting people know the outcome: Informing the people you care about (and who care about you) can be an emotional process especially if the news is disappointing. You may choose to cover before the interview/hearing (versus after) how you decide to handle whatever news you receive, regardless of outcome. Remember, and don't hesitate to remind them too, that a decision not to consider you for a parole is not the end nor is it to be chalked up to a waste of time. Each positive step you take to displaying positive characteristics adds up over time. Keep building on all the good and stay focused on continuing to do your best, to keep growing and learning, and to live your life as your highest and best self.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

Talk with others who have had interviews or public hearings to better understand from them, first-hand, what it is like.

Start building good rapport and good relations with prison staff now.

Ask your counselor, in addition to checking the boxes, to write good comments on block reports concerning your behavior.

If you have a weakness requiring treatment, be well-prepared to comment on how you've arranged to address it on the outside, e.g. substance abuse: you will be enrolled in _____ program upon your release.

DON'T WAIT FOR NOTICE

You normally will get plenty of notice before meeting with the Parole Board, but it isn't guaranteed. It is possible you may not get much notice for an interview, so it can be helpful to start preparing for your interview sooner rather than later. In other words, don't wait for a notice to take the time to step back, lean into it, and begin preparing and practicing. It's too important to wait.

This document was prepared for you by:



We provide personalized, problem-solving services for prisoners who don't know where to turn.

If you found this guide helpful and want to support our mission, please consider donating.

If you cannot donate, please consider *paying it forward*. Share a kindness with someone when you can.

And if you would like any additional support, please don't hesitate to ask. We're here to help.

Write, call, or message us by JPay.

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HFP

Humanity for Prisoners

Action with Compassion

SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUTATION/PAROLE PROCESS

- **Rapport** Start building good relations with prison staff now
- **Behavior** No more tickets. None. Others have done it. You can, too.
- **Counselor** Ask your counselor, in addition to checking the boxes, to write good comments on block reports concerning your behavior
- **Programs** Get in to good programs, or at least keep records of requesting to be in programs.
- **Crime** State your crime as it is on the pre-sentence investigation. No modifications.
- **Family** It is important for family members to be active, but NOT to make excuses
- **Community** When you indicate your placement, employment and support, take note that community support matters even more than family support. Commutation applications need support.
- **Weakness** If you have a weakness, comment on it and how it will be address, e.g. substance abuse: you will be enrolled in _____ program upon your release.
- **Psych** You must have a psych report. Our sources say this report has power.
- **A MUST** **You much acknowledge crime and show remorse.** If you insist that you did not commit the crime, at least show sadness for the results and sympathy for the victims. Your feelings here are critical.

Writing Letters of Support to the Parole Board

You can submit letters of support to the Michigan Parole Board attesting to your loved one's (your LO) character and, most importantly, their reform and plans to improve his or her life. Well-written letters can make a real difference in how the Parole Board sees your LO as a person, not just an inmate or a criminal. It also helps them understand what your LO can expect if they were to be released which can serve to alleviate some of their own worries about the future of their decisions. Especially because of the importance, some folks wrestle with what to say and how to say it. This guide is not legal advice but is intended to give you some direction and help in crafting the most effective letter possible.

WHAT DO I WRITE ABOUT?

Character letters can address any/all of the positive changes you've seen during your LO's time of incarceration. What is even more effective, however, are letters outlining what kind of support you are willing to provide your LO upon release. Also, help your LO (if you can) in getting support. More support and more letters from the biggest number of people possible demonstrates a strong support network which is a very important consideration for release. Tone is also essential. It is very important not to explain or risk minimizing their crime. Don't say "it was just a really bad decision" or "it was an accident" or "that's not like them at all." It is much better instead to discuss how your LO has accepted responsibility and shown remorse for their actions, and how they're putting in the necessary effort to move on productively.

WHAT DO I DO WITH THE LETTER?

You will send your letter to the Parole Board ahead of your LO's interview or hearing and provide your LO a copy as well in case it doesn't get filed in time or gets misplaced. The address is on the next page/sample letter.

GENERAL TIPS

Be professional. This letter will be put in your LO's file and could potentially have a big impact on their future. Use appropriate language and proper grammar, avoid typos and poor spelling. Letters should be typed or printed on plain white paper with your signature at the end. Include your return address on the envelope as well.

Take the time to write a first draft and work on revising it a couple of times. Use your first attempt to work out the kinks. Think about what you want to accomplish with your letter and how and just get it down on paper. Then proof-read it and fine-tune it to make it the best it can be. Remember, the goal of your letter is to convince the parole board of your LO's ability to be successful returning home. Help them to see how you will support them in doing so.

The internet is your friend. There are a lot of crazy things on the internet, but it can also provide a lot of good information if you know what you're looking for and how to find it. If you have access to a computer (your local public library can help you with this), type "How to write a good parole board letter of support" into your search bar. You will find all kinds of examples to draw from. You'll see things from other states, but that's okay. You can find samples of how other people have worded their letters which can be really helpful if you're not great with crafting your own – not all of us find that easy to do.

This document was produced for you by:



**Humanity
for Prisoners**
Action with Compassion

Humanity for Prisoners seeks to provide personalized, problem-solving services for inmates and their loved ones who don't know where to turn. If you found this guide helpful, please consider donating. And if you would like any additional support, do not hesitate to ask us. We're here to help.

Letter formatting sample and considerations

Month Day, Year

Your First Middle Last Name

Address

City, State zip code

RE: Your loved one's name and inmate #

Michigan Department of Corrections

Office of the Parole Board

PO Box 30003

Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Members of the Parole Board,

Paragraph 1 - Get directly to the point. Generally, try not to waste time on sentences that don't matter – such as “I know you are busy...” or “I'm sure you get a lot of letters...” That's their job and there's no reason in stating the obvious. Just politely get to the point. A good first paragraph is short and sweet: *My name is xxx. I am writing this letter in support of [your LO's name] who will be eligible for parole in [month year].*

Paragraph 2 – Explain who you are and how you know your LO. Ex: *I am [LO's name] brother/best-friend/former-employee/daughter/father/we worked together/etc..* You may include how long you have known your LO, how you came to know them (if not family), and what your relationship is like. How often do you communicate? Visit? Show the Parole Board you really know this person. Ex: *We worked closely together for three years at X Co. or our kids were best friends and we shared carpool throughout their grade school years.* Your goal should be to demonstrate that you know the person well. Also share a bit about who you are including what you do and possible community affiliations you may have.

Paragraph 3 – Explain what you are offering. Be specific about the nature of your support you are providing now as well as what you plan to provide. It could be anything from spiritual or emotional support to meals or networking for jobs, a place to live or transportation. We know that being "real" about this support provides the letter maximum credibility. This means that the support you offer may have conditions in the spirit of accountability, guidance, and love. Here are a few brief examples of conditional support: *I'll provide emotional support for Joe when he asks for it and will offer it if I see him in need.* Or *I'll use my network of professional contacts to help Joe get a job as long as he makes himself available for interviews and job coaching.* Or *I'll give Joe a room in my home at [address] for up to [some finite period of time] while he finds his own place. We have agreed he will contribute to the household chores and maintenance until he can begin paying rent in his own place.*

Paragraph 4 - Wrap up your letter. You may want to simply and briefly reinforce what you've already shared and why you believe in your LO. You may end with something like: *I believe beyond a doubt that given the opportunity of parole, Joe will come home and make us all proud.* You will find your own words here as you speak from your heart and your own authentic place. Add: *Thank you for your time and attention.*

Respectfully,

(Hit return 4 times and sign your name in this empty space, above your typed name.)

Type Your Name