



GUIDANCE FOR DEVELOPING A PAROLE PACKET

The purpose of a parole packet is to put forward a candidate's best case for parole. It is a document that will give the Parole Commission an understanding of the following:

- The writer's own perspective on the journey which brought him or her to prison;
- The ways in which the writer has developed as a person while in prison;
- The writer's plans for the future, both immediately if released on parole, and more long-term.

A copy of the parole packet should be sent to the Parole Commission at least a week or two before their hearing. (The address is: 6776 Reisterstown Road, Ste 307, Baltimore, MD 21215. The phone number is 410-585-3256.) The candidate should also have their own copy of the packet to bring to the hearing.

PREPARE is a nonprofit with a mission of empowering people to make their best case for parole. We pursue this mission by providing information about, materials for, and support with parole hearing preparation in Maryland. We began our program in the Maryland Correctional Institution for Women where we provide direct in-person support with parole hearing preparation.

The guidance you are reading right now is intended for those who are not receiving direct advocacy support. The intent is for them to be able to put together a parole packet on their own. This guidance follows a very similar structure to that which we use when working with clients directly.





PAROLE PACKET SUMMARY

In this section of the parole packet, we tend to use a dashboard table. We have given you the structure below in case you'd like to use it. An alternative would be to write a letter which touches on the information that would otherwise be put in a table.

If there are things that you don't know the answer to, just state that. If there are things that are not relevant to you, say so, and explain why. Keep the answers very brief in this table. You will elaborate on the answers elsewhere in the parole packet. This is just a snapshot.

Name	
DOB and Current Age	
DOC Number	
Conviction	
Trial or Plea	
Sentence	
Date of Crime	
Date of Sentencing	
Date Incarceration Began	
Date Parole Eligibility Reached	
Date of Next Parole Hearing, and Outcomes of Previous Hearing(s)	
Infractions	



PAROLE PACKET SUMMARY

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Prior Criminal Offending	
Prior Supervision (probation or parole)	
Education Level	
Substance Abuse History	
Mental Health History	
Home Plan	
Employment plan	
Jobs While Incarcerated	
Main Family Support	
Current MSR Date	
Estimated Final MSR Date (if not granted parole)	

“There is no humane punishment
without a horizon. No one can change
their life if they don’t see a horizon.”

Pope Francis



ADVOCACY LETTER

This is the section of the parole packet in which to set out your strongest arguments for parole in a letter. When PREPARE is working with a client, this letter comes from the parole advocate. If you don't have a parole advocate, the letter can come directly from you.

The main part of the letter should set out arguments which relate to the factors set out in law, that the Parole Commission has regard to. The end of the letter is strategic. It is where you specify what you are asking of the Parole Commission.

Here are some examples of arguments that can be made in support of a person's case for parole. Obviously, these need to be specific to each individual.

Public Safety Risk	This is X's only incarceration. She has no prior criminal record and has never had an infraction. She would not pose a public safety risk.
	X is not the young man he was when first incarcerated. He has grown and matured. While he had infractions early on, he has not had one in ten years. He has participated in X programs (specify) and now serves as a mentor to others. If released on parole today, he would not pose a public safety risk.
Strong Reentry Plan	X has an excellent reentry plan. She has been interviewed and accepted into the PIVOT Program which provides wrap around reentry support to women, places all participants in jobs at the end of the program, and stays connected with alumni to ensure they always have work and support.
	X has an excellent reentry plan. He has a transitional housing place at Penn North which will begin with intensive substance abuse programming, leading gradually toward independent living over the course of a year.



ADVOCACY LETTER

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Progress in Education and other Programming	X arrived in MCIW with a 9th grade education level. She obtained her GED and was accepted into the Goucher College Program. She has spent three years taking college classes and has excellent letters of recommendation from professors.
	X has participated in all possible substance abuse programming available to him through the institution. Most recently he completed the Celebrate Recovery program and became a peer specialist.
Remorse	X is deeply remorseful for the actions which have brought her into prison. From her remorse statement it's clear she has a level of emotional maturity and insight into the challenges she faces which were not present at the time of the crime.
Views of Sentencing Judge	It is clear from the portion of the sentencing transcript included in this parole packet that Judge Z who sentenced X considered it would be appropriate for him to serve no more than three years before moving on to out-patient addiction treatment.

Strategy

Not everyone is an equally good candidate when they go up for parole. It's important to be realistic and regard the hearing as a dialogue with the Parole Commission. For those who have a strong reentry plan, a good infraction record and are at, or passed, parole eligibility, asking for immediate parole is the right approach. For others, the right approach might be to ask for a rehear and to present a set of goals to be accomplished before the next parole hearing, and a plan for accomplishing them. (The aim with this strategy is to avoid a refusal.) Another strategy is to ask for a delayed release and specify what will be accomplished in the time before release. A delayed grant could make you eligible for work release.



LIFE STORY

This section is intended to put the events which led to your incarceration into the context of your life. Whereas at trial it is only the specific events of the crime which are relevant, at a parole hearing, your past, your present, and your future are relevant.

It is almost always the case that understanding someone's wider story makes the actions which brought them into prison more understandable. The point of the life story is to explain not excuse though.

Here are some tips on writing a life story for a parole packet:

- **Consider the audience:** The life story is written to be read by members of the Parole Commission. This doesn't mean it will be dishonest in any way; it simply means it will be structured around the incarceration.
- **Don't let it run too long:** You could begin by writing a version of your life story just for yourself, which could be as long as you want. But the version which goes in the parole packet should be kept to no more than about four pages.
- **Stay focused** on explaining your incarceration and why you are a good candidate for parole: this life story is not a place for venting. Try not to use it as an opportunity to place blame on other people or institutions, however deserved that blame might be. Also don't treat this as an appeal. The Parole Commission has no power to release you based on the soundness or fairness of your conviction.
- **Here's a suggested structure:**
 1. Birth and childhood to include background that may be relevant to understanding how you came to be incarcerated.
 2. Any particular event which, with hindsight, can be seen as the beginning of a downward spiral, for example over-prescription of narcotics.
 3. Events which led up to the crime, and then an honest narrative of the crime itself. (Don't downplay it – the Parole Commission will know the details.)
 4. Reflection on what you were thinking - or failing to think about - when the crime happened. For example, a burglary in the midst of being in withdrawal could be explained, but not excused, by reference to that mental state. That can then be followed up by a reflection from today's point of view - for example recognizing how scary it must be for a person to realize there is an intruder in their home in the middle of the night.
 5. Beginning of incarceration, challenges faced, and challenges overcome.
 6. If there was a turning point moment, talk about that.
 7. Positive achievements and how they go to readiness for release. If there are specific programs that helped you overcome issues that led to the crime, detail these. This should not be a laundry list of certificates. Instead you should highlight the two or three most impactful programs.
 8. Future plans and how they make for a strong reentry plan.



REMORSE STATEMENT

In some parole packets it is acceptable for the person's sense of remorse to be woven into their life story, so it will all be in one document. However, for some people it makes more sense for remorse to be dealt with in a separate section of their packet. This is particularly important where the crime involved violence or where there was a loss of life.

A remorse statement is an opportunity for you to address and acknowledge your crime directly and explain to the Parole Commission how remorseful you are for the harm done to those affected by your actions.

The key point in a remorse statement is to be truthful and sincere. Keep in mind that the hearing officer and parole commissioners will have the details of the offense in the institutional file; there is nothing at all to be gained by downplaying or being less than truthful about what happened. Keep in mind also, that anything which is set out in the parole packet can be raised by the hearing officer or parole commissioners at the hearing, so don't write anything you are not prepared to talk about.

Parole commissioners and hearing officers will recognize that there can be some very painful memories which can be difficult to tackle head on. They will also realize that in the story which brought you into prison there can be significant ways in which you yourself were victimized. That should be covered in the life story section. Make sure the remorse statement doesn't become an explanation of why you weren't actually to blame.

The remorse statement does not need to be long. It will probably be shorter than the life story, perhaps one page or less, because the life story will have set out the background. Some people address their remorse statement to their victim, even if it is not actually going to be sent to the victim.

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REMORSE STATEMENT

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The remorse statement should focus primarily on remorse for the crime itself, but it can certainly mention a broader sense of remorse for the consequences which have fallen on others, for example on children and family members.

Don't think of the remorse statement as a way of conceding that you are the bad one while other humans and human institutions are all positive. It is the opposite, to be human is to fail to live up to our potential. We humans - and all of our human institutions - are not as good as we could be. To be human, however, is also to be able to reflect upon that fact and to choose a higher path.

Engaging honestly and earnestly with the parole system does not mean you think the system is fair. It does not mean there aren't major historical and contemporary injustices forming part of the narrative that brings you to where you are today. Engaging honestly and earnestly with the parole system simply means that you consider that you could do better in the future than you've done in the past.

If you are innocent and have always maintained your innocence, continue to do so in your remorse statement but keep in mind that a parole hearing is in no sense an appeal against a conviction, so there is no point in detailed arguments about evidence and so forth.

“Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible.”

Viktor Frankl



REENTRY PLAN

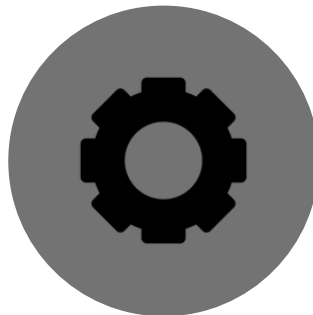
The reentry plan is the most important section of the parole packet. Try to make your plan as strong as possible, backing each element up with supporting documentation.

At PREPARE, when we work with a client directly, we help make connections with reentry providers. It is obviously difficult to research options, make phone calls, and send emails from prison. If you don't have a parole advocate, ask a family member to help you build your reentry plan. They may find www.returnhome.org a good starting point.

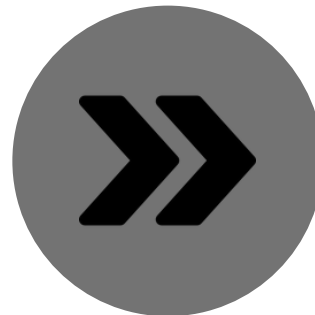
The reentry plan in your parole packet should be one or two pages which summarize the following three things:



HOME
PLAN



EMPLOYMENT
PLAN



REENTRY
SUPPORT
PLAN



REENTRY PLAN: HOME PLAN

PART 1: HOME PLAN

Under this heading put the address where you will live and specify whether it is transitional housing, the home of a family member, or some other option.

If you are going to be living with a family member, specify their relationship to you. As supporting documentation include a letter from that family member which states that their home will be where you will go on release, states who else lives there, and confirms that there is space for you. That letter could be accompanied by photographs of the home.

If you are going to transitional housing, as supporting documentation include your letter of acceptance and a flyer setting out the services provided.

If your home plan has not been firmed up yet, give as much information as you can, and specify the options you are looking into. If you are part way through the application process for transitional housing, document this. The Parole Commission will recognize that some reentry housing options require an actual release date before allocating a bed to someone - which is a chicken and egg problem for people preparing for parole hearings.



HOME
PLAN



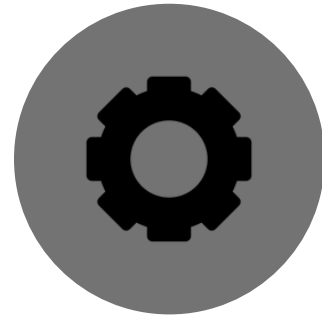
REENTRY PLAN: EMPLOYMENT PLAN

PART 2: EMPLOYMENT PLAN

Under this heading, set out your plan for employment. Technically, having a job lined up is a requirement for parole; in practice the requirement is often waived because, of course, it is very hard to secure employment from within prison.

If you do have a job, be very specific as to what it is and include a letter from your employer as supporting documentation. Some reentry programs and transitional housing programs include employment readiness as part of their programming, but they tend to have people focus on adapting to life on the outside in the first few weeks and then switch to focusing on employment. If you have been accepted into a program which includes employment readiness, mention that under this heading giving as much detail as possible.

If you have nothing lined up, set out your plans, and various leads you will follow up on. If you have reason to believe you will qualify for disability when released, explain this and try to document it.



EMPLOYMENT PLAN



REENTRY PLAN: SUPPORT PLAN

PART 3: REENTRY SUPPORT PLAN

In this section set out the various people and organizations who will help you to reestablish yourself and be successful in your reentry. List the key family members and friends who will be in your life and specify what support they have provided and will provide.

Specify any non-residential reentry program or support group you will be taking part in. Include details, and acceptance letters where you have them. Be specific about what services you will receive. If there is a church or community group which will be important on your reentry, give information and, if possible, a letter of confirmation.



REENTRY
SUPPORT
PLAN



EVALUATIONS AND LETTERS OF SUPPORT

This section is for written testimony from others which goes to your readiness for parole. It can include things like work evaluations where something positive has been said about you, letters of support written specifically for your parole packet, as well as other written testimony that might go to readiness for parole.

At the start of this section have a page or two which lists the letters and evaluations in the section, specifying what they are and who has written them. After that summary include the documents themselves, in the order that you listed them. You might want to go through them and use a highlighter pen to pick out the most important quotes.

On Gathering Letters of Recommendation

When it comes to letters of recommendation, quality is more important than quantity. Letters can come from people who know you from your time in prison and from people who know you from outside of prison. A good letter of recommendation should always begin by explaining how the writer knows you, and then go on to set out the writer's knowledge of your good qualities and the reasons why the writer believes you are ready for and will make a success of parole. Every letter will be different, but topics covered could include:

- The way in which you have grown and matured while incarcerated;
- Specific achievements of which the writer has knowledge;
- Positive character traits; and
- Any support the writer will provide once you are released. Support could be financial, practical, emotional or moral.

**"Work with what you have control of
and you'll have your hands full."**

James Stockdale



CERTIFICATES AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

This last section is where you put certificates relating to the various programs and courses you have taken part in while incarcerated. It should begin with a cover sheet, which lists everything. You could arrange things chronologically, or you could make subheadings which group things together not by date but by topic. An example is below. This approach is particularly useful if there is a topic which relates specifically to the reason you are in prison – for example substance abuse, or parenting - and you have worked hard on addressing that issue by taking part in numerous programs.

Education:

- Most Recent Transcript from Such and Such College, Spring 2020
- GED, 2016

Work:

- DLLR Certificate of Achievement for Maintenance and Repair 2020
- DLLR Certificate of Achievement for Plumbing 2017
- DLLR Certificate of Achievement for Grounds Keeping 2016
- Employee of the Year, Maintenance Department, 2019

Life Skills:

- Alternatives to Violence, Advanced Course, 2019
- Alternatives to Violence Basic Course 2018

If a certificate is included in the parole packet, be prepared to speak about it, and explain how it relates to skills or knowledge which will serve you well upon release. Try to make sure that the certificates are in the same order as they are listed on the cover sheet.

“Start where you are, use what you have, do what you can.”

Arthur Ashe