



**Testimony of Jim Fox, Chairperson  
Pennsylvania Parole Board  
House Appropriations Committee  
March 3, 2025**

Good Morning Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and distinguished members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Parole Board's budget request for Fiscal Year 2025-26.

My name is Jim Fox. I have worked with the Pennsylvania Parole Board since my appointment as Board Member in 2007. Over the years, I have served as a Board Member, Chief Hearing Examiner, and, since June 2023, Board Chairman.

Before addressing our budget request, I would like to provide an update on the Parole Board's recent activities.

Our goal remains to administer a fair system and to protect the residents of the Commonwealth. We are committed to our mission, utilizing actuarial assessments, structured decision-making, and professional judgment to guide our determinations. Over the last 18 months, we have successfully implemented Parole Guidelines established by the Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission, which help assess risk and preparedness for release. Since the guidelines became effective, the Board has followed the guideline recommendation in 82% of cases and automation of this process has enabled us to collect meaningful data used to improve our decision making moving forward. Additionally, we have implemented the Commission's parole recommitment ranges to guide decisions regarding parole violators.

To enhance transparency, we launched the Parole for Success program, through which Board Members meet directly with incarcerated individuals in State Correctional Institutions to discuss the parole process and gather feedback. Since meeting every individual is not feasible, we partnered with Commonwealth Media Services to produce an informational video on parole considerations, aiming to make prisons safer and help individuals prepare for a successful reentry.

Across the Commonwealth, we have conducted numerous "Understanding PA Parole" seminars to educate community stakeholders on the parole process. In partnership with the Department of Corrections and the Office of Victim Advocate, we offer insights into available programs and parole procedures. These symposiums also provide a platform to inform Board decision-makers on key issues, including autism awareness, brain trauma, vicarious trauma, and human trafficking.

In FY 2023-24, the Parole Board interviewed 11,584 incarcerated individuals for parole consideration and granted parole to 43% of these individuals. The one-year recommitment rate of individuals released from incarceration during the 2023 calendar year was 21.5%. The recommitment rate between 2019 to 2021 of incarcerated individuals released was 37.8%.

The Board has a full complement and is fully engaged in evaluating individuals for parole release. To determine whether or not to parole someone, decision makers interview incarcerated individuals and review numerous reports and assessments, including actuarial instruments that predict the likelihood of future criminal behavior. Decision makers also consider criminal history, past parole or probation supervision history, psychological reports, prison-life behavior, vocational and educational program involvement, compliance with prescriptive programs that address criminogenic and/or addiction needs, home plans, and reintegration plans. We also consider recommendations from judges, district attorneys, and the victims themselves. In the last fiscal year, our decision makers participated in 901 in-person victim comments. We have now expanded this program so victims can participate virtually or meet in person with Board Members at four locations across the Commonwealth.

The Parole Board continually strives to improve its work. To become more effective in promoting community safety, we regularly monitor parolee outcomes, board decisions, and the reports and assessments available to us.

The Parole Board continues to embrace the use of technology in all aspects of our decision making and outcome measurement. This continues to lead to efficiencies that both speed up the parole and hearing processes and provide decision makers with more timely access to critical information.

For the coming year, the Parole Board is requesting funding to support mandated parole processes and cost-to-carry expenses. The requested amount will allow the agency to serve Pennsylvania's parole-eligible population and improve our parole decision process. In the current fiscal year, the budget for the Parole Board is \$13.373 Million. This figure includes essential funding for the board, which includes the Hearing Examiners Office and the Records and Administration Office. In FY 2025-26 we are requesting \$13.825 million to continue to fund our essential operations.

Going forward, in addition to advancing the efforts from Act 59 of 2021, the Parole Board looks forward to continuing to implement the common-sense criminal justice reforms outlined in Pennsylvania's Justice Reinvestment Initiative 2 (JRI2). The Parole Board and the DOC will continue to be active participants in the Parole Homicide Review Team, which will report annually on circumstances and efforts to reduce homicides committed by persons on parole.

I am optimistic that the increased opportunities to reduce recidivism by using evidence-based practices to deter and reform criminal behavior will allow us to continue to

enhance public safety. I continue to be encouraged by Governor Shapiro's leadership in this area, and share the Governor's belief that a safer, more united Pennsylvania is a better Pennsylvania.

Chairman Harris, Chairman Struzzi, and honorable committee members, thank you for your time and consideration of these additional resources. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.