

What Is a Parole Board Letter and Why It Matters

Parole board letters are written statements submitted to a parole board before a release hearing. They help decision makers understand who will support the person after release, what risks exist, and whether a solid plan is in place. Unlike courtroom testimony, these letters become part of the permanent parole file. While support letters are often accessible to the incarcerated person and their legal counsel, letters of opposition or victim statements are frequently kept confidential from the applicant for safety reasons.

If you are writing a parole support letter, your goal is not to argue legal innocence. Your goal is to provide trustworthy, firsthand information that shows accountability, rehabilitation, and community readiness.

Definition: support letter vs opposition letter vs victim impact statement

Parole support letter: Written by family, friends, employers, mentors, or program providers. It describes your relationship, the person's growth, and the concrete help you will provide for housing, work, or treatment.

Letter of opposition: Usually submitted by prosecutors, law enforcement, or community members who believe release would pose a risk. These focus on public safety concerns.

Victim impact statement: Provided by victims or their families. It describes ongoing harm and is given special weight under most state victims' rights laws. A good support letter never minimizes this perspective.

How parole boards actually use letters in release decisions

Parole boards in states that still utilize traditional parole (such as California, Texas, and New York) use structured risk assessments to guide their decisions. At the federal level, traditional parole has been abolished for most offenses committed after 1987, replaced by 'supervised release' which does not involve a parole board hearing for release. Letters do not override the offense history, but they answer three critical questions boards must resolve:

1. Has the person accepted responsibility and changed behavior
2. Is there a realistic, verifiable release plan
3. Will community support reduce the chance of reoffending

Board guidelines specifically instruct members to look for specific facts, not general praise. A letter that says "John is a good person" carries little weight. A letter that says "I have known John for eight years through our welding program, he completed 240 hours of training, and I have offered him a full time position starting within 72 hours of release at \$22 per hour" directly addresses risk and readiness.

Types of Parole Board Letters You Can Submit

Parole boards do not treat all letters equally. The writer's relationship to the person and the type of support offered determine how much weight the letter carries. Understanding which category you fit into helps you focus on the right details and avoid common errors that reduce credibility.

Family Support Letters

These come from parents, spouses, partners, siblings, adult children, or extended family. Boards value family letters for housing stability and long term accountability, but they also expect honesty about the offense. The most effective family letters include specific details about where the person will live, house rules, transportation to work or treatment, and how the family will respond if rules are broken. Avoid emotional pleas or claims of innocence. Focus on structure and supervision.

Friend and Character Reference Letters

Long term friends can speak to character before and after incarceration. Parole commissioners look for length of relationship, frequency of contact during incarceration, and observable changes. Include examples of phone calls, visits, participation in programs you discussed together, and concrete ways you will help with reentry such as mentoring, driving to appointments, or connecting to community resources. Letters from friends who only knew the person before the crime carry less weight unless they show continued involvement.

Employer, Job Offer, and Reentry Employment Letters

Employment letters are among the strongest parole support letters because they directly reduce risk factors. An employer should state the business name, position offered, start date contingent on release, hourly wage or salary, work schedule, and supervision plan. Include whether the job is full time, whether training is provided, and if you are aware of the conviction history. Attach a formal offer letter on company letterhead. Even a conditional offer for part time work or apprenticeship is valuable if it is verifiable.

Community, Faith Leader, Mentor, and Program Sponsor Letters

Pastors, rabbis, imams, sponsors from Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous, counselors, coaches, and nonprofit mentors provide third party credibility. Boards trust these writers because they have no family bias and often have professional experience with reentry. Describe your role, how long you have worked with the person, programs completed, attendance records, spiritual or behavioral growth, and your ongoing commitment to meet regularly after release. Include your organization's contact information and credentials.

Victim Input Statements and Letters of Opposition

While you may be writing in support, you need to understand the weight of [letters opposing release](#). Victim input statements are given priority consideration in most states and focus on lasting harm, safety concerns, and restitution status. Letters from prosecutors typically focus on the gravity of the original crime, while the board's own internal reports cite disciplinary records and risk assessments. A strong support letter never attacks victims or dismisses these concerns. Instead, it testifies to the applicant's demonstrated remorse, acknowledges the harm caused, and explains concrete safeguards.

Self Advocacy Letter From the Incarcerated Person

Many boards allow or require a personal statement from the applicant. This is not the same as a support letter, but your supporters should align their letters with the person's own accountability narrative. The personal letter should accept responsibility, describe specific programs completed, relapse

prevention plans, and detailed housing and employment steps. When family and employer letters repeat the same verifiable plan, the file appears coordinated and trustworthy.

Who Should Write and Who Should Not

Parole boards read hundreds of letters for each hearing docket. They quickly sort them by credibility. A letter from the right person with direct knowledge can shift a close decision. A letter from the wrong person can hurt the case by appearing coached, biased, or uninformed.

Credibility Factors Parole Boards Look For

Boards prioritize writers who have firsthand experience with the applicant during incarceration and a clear role after release. The strongest writers share four traits: long term relationship, regular contact, no financial incentive, and ability to verify claims. Employers on letterhead, licensed counselors, clergy with a congregation, and family members offering stable housing rank highest. Judges and parole commissioners in California, Texas, and New York training manuals specifically instruct staff to discount letters that are vague, identical to others, or written by someone with no ongoing supervision role.

Your credibility increases when you include your full name, address, phone number, occupation, and relationship length. If you are an employer or program provider, include your professional license number or business contact. This allows board investigators to verify your statement.

Relationship Length and Direct Knowledge Requirements

A five year friendship with monthly calls and documented visits carries more weight than a childhood friend who has not spoken in ten years. Boards want to see evidence of change, not nostalgia. Ideal writers have known the person both before the offense and during incarceration, and can describe specific behavioral shifts.

Do not write if you only know the case through social media, if you cannot describe the crime accurately, or if you are unwilling to acknowledge responsibility. Letters that minimize the offense, blame the victim, or claim innocence when guilt was established at trial are flagged as untrustworthy.

Avoid having multiple people sign one form letter. Boards prefer five unique, detailed letters over fifty identical signatures. Also avoid writers with active warrants or unresolved legal issues. If a writer has a criminal history, they should only write if they can demonstrate their own long-term rehabilitation. If you are unsure, it is better to provide a brief, honest letter than a long, exaggerated one.

Essential Structure and Format

A well formatted parole board letter is easier for commissioners to read, verify, and file. Boards in most states scan letters into a digital case file, so clear structure directly affects how much weight your statement receives. Following a professional format shows respect for the process and helps your parole support letter stand out from generic submissions.

Correct Addressing by State and Board Name

Always address the specific authority holding the hearing. Using the wrong name can delay processing. For California, use "Board of Parole Hearings, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation." For Texas, use "Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles." For New York, use "New York State Board of Parole." For federal cases (crimes committed before 1987 or D.C. Code offenses), use "United States Parole Commission." Include the full mailing address from the board's website, and add "Re: Parole Consideration Hearing" on the subject line. If submitting by email or portal, use the exact case number format the board provides.

Required Header Information: Inmate Name, DOC/DIN Number, Hearing Date

Place this information at the top of your letter so staff can match it instantly to the correct file. Include the incarcerated person's full legal name, Department of Corrections number or Bureau of Prisons register number, date of birth, current facility, and the scheduled hearing date if known. Then add your own full name, mailing address, phone number, email, and relationship to the applicant. A clear header prevents your parole board letter from being misfiled, which is a common reason strong letters are never seen by commissioners.

Example header format: Date, To the Board, Re: John A. Doe, CDCR #AB1234, Hearing: June 15, 2026, From: Maria Doe, sister, 123 Main St, Sometown TX 77001.

Professional Tone, Length, and Page

Limits

Keep your letter to one page, or a maximum of two pages if you are an employer or program provider attaching details. Use business letter format, 11 or 12 point font, single spacing, and plain language. Write in the first person and maintain a respectful, factual tone throughout. Avoid slang, ALL CAPS, or emotional language. Boards prefer direct statements over long stories.

Sign the letter by hand if mailing, or use a digital signature for portal submissions. Many states require notarization for family housing offers, so check local rules before sending. Include "Sincerely" followed by your printed name and signature.

What to Include: Powerful Content Checklist

The strongest parole board letters serve as evidentiary character references that bridge the gap between prison records and life in the community. Parole commissioners are trained to scan for specific facts that reduce risk. Use this checklist to make sure your parole support letter includes the details boards actually weigh in release decisions.

Concrete Examples vs Vague Praise

Replace general statements with observable behavior. Instead of "she is trustworthy," write "she has managed the prison commissary inventory for 18 months with no discrepancies and trains new clerks each quarter." Instead of "he is remorseful," write "he wrote apology letters in 2023, completed victim awareness in 2024, and discusses his accountability plan weekly with his counselor." Concrete

examples prove change, while vague praise is discounted. Always pair a trait with a date, place, and action that a board can verify in the central file.

Programs Completed, Education, Therapy, Sobriety

List every completed program with full names and completion dates. Include substance abuse treatment, anger management, cognitive behavioral therapy, domestic violence prevention, parenting classes, vocational certifications, college courses, and faith based studies. Note sobriety dates, AA or NA sponsor relationships, and clean drug screens. For education, include degrees, certificates, GPA if strong, and tutoring roles. Refer to specific certificates by name and date; only attach copies if the board's specific jurisdiction requires them, as most boards already have these in the C-File.

Community Ties and Accountability Measures

Boards release people to communities, not to good intentions. Describe stable housing with full address and lease status, reliable transportation, health insurance or Medicaid enrollment plan, and scheduled medical or mental health appointments. Detail employment by mentioning a firm job offer or vocational path, and if possible, include a separate 'Letter of Intent to Hire' from the employer. Explain your accountability role: weekly check ins, curfews, random drug testing support, money management, and your commitment to support the person in following all parole conditions, maintaining an open line of communication with their Parole Officer. Strong community ties and clear accountability measures are the most persuasive elements in any parole board letter.

Verified Housing and Residential Acceptance

Boards view housing instability as a primary driver of recidivism. A vague offer of “a place to stay” is often discounted as high-risk. Replace “he can live with me” with a formal declaration of residential acceptance. A formal **Letter of Residential Acceptance** can provide the board with a guaranteed, “night #1” address that they can verify.

- Vague: “He has a room at my house whenever he gets out.”
- Concrete: “I am the primary leaseholder at [Full Address]. I have obtained written permission from my landlord for [Name] to reside here indefinitely. He will have a private bedroom, access to a landline for electronic monitoring if required, and is located 0.5 miles from a major bus hub.”

Explicitly state your legal authority to provide housing (owner or leaseholder) and confirm that the environment is stable, drug-free, and compliant with any potential parole conditions, such as distance from schools or victims if applicable. Verification of a “night-one” bed is the foundation of a successful release plan.

What to Avoid: Common Mistakes That Hurt a Case

Even a sincere parole board letter can damage a case if it contains the wrong language. Parole commissioners are trained to flag minimization, unrealistic promises, and coordinated campaigns. Avoiding these three mistakes is essential when learning how to write a parole letter that helps instead of harms.

Blaming the Victim or System

Never shift responsibility to the victim, the police, the prosecutor, or the judge. Statements like “he was railroaded” or “the victim exaggerated” signal a lack of insight and are frequently cited as evidence of current dangerousness or unsuitability. A credible parole support letter acknowledges the harm caused, reflects the facts of the record, and focuses on remorse and repair. You can support release while still validating the seriousness of the offense. Boards specifically look for this balance as a trustworthiness marker.

Making Promises You Cannot Keep

Do not promise 24 hour supervision, guaranteed sobriety, or a job you do not control. Parole boards scrutinize the feasibility of housing, employment, and treatment plans, and unrealistic promises are documented as unstable or unreliable reentry programming. Instead of absolute guarantees, describe realistic support and clear boundaries. Write “I will provide a bedroom at my home for the first six months, drive him to three scheduled AA meetings per week, and report any missed curfew to his parole officer” rather than “I will make sure he never messes up again.” Specific, enforceable commitments strengthen your parole board letter and protect your credibility.

Form Letters and Copy-Paste Templates

Submitting twenty identical letters signed by different people is one of the fastest ways to lose credibility. Board staff may compare letters and flag duplicate language as an organized campaign, not independent support. Each parole board letter template should be personalized with unique details about your relationship, specific dates, and your individual role after release. Avoid online samples that you copy word for word. Use a template for structure, but rewrite every

paragraph in your own voice with firsthand examples. Original, detailed letters carry far more weight than volume.

Parole Board Letter Templates by Writer Type

Use these parole board letter templates as a starting framework, then personalize every sentence with your own details. Boards reject copy-paste letters, but they reward clear structure. Each template below follows the format parole commissioners expect: header information, relationship, accountability, and a specific release plan.

Template: Family Member Support Letter

[Date]

Board of Parole Hearings
[Full Board Address]

Re: Parole Support for [Full Legal Name], DOC #, Hearing Date[Number][Date]

Dear Honorable Board Members:

My name is [Your Full Name], I am the of [Applicant Name], and I reside at [Full Address]. I have known [him/her] for years, and I have maintained [weekly/monthly] contact during the past years of incarceration through visits, calls, and letters.[relationship][number]

I understand [Applicant Name] was convicted of in, and I do not minimize the harm caused. During incarceration, I have observed clear change. [He/She] completed [program names and dates], has maintained clear conduct for [time period], and

speaks openly about responsibility and victim impact.[offense][year]

If released, [Applicant Name] will live with me at the address above. My home is stable, substance free, and available for inspection and approval for [Applicant Name]'s residency. I will provide transportation to all parole appointments, to employment, and to [treatment name] which is scheduled for. We have established house rules including curfew, no alcohol, and mandatory weekly check ins.[frequency]

I am committed to supporting successful reentry and I will notify the parole officer immediately if any rules are violated. Please feel free to contact me at or to verify this plan.[phone][email]

Respectfully, I ask that you grant parole to [Applicant Name].

Sincerely,

[Printed Name]

[Signature]

Template: Employer or Job Offer Letter

[Company Letterhead]

[Date]

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles

[Full Board Address]

Re: Employment Offer for [Full Legal Name], TDCJ #[Number]

To Whom It May Concern:

I am [Your Name], at [Company Name] in. I am writing to confirm a contingent job offer for [Applicant Name], whom I previously supervised for [time period] before incarceration.[Title][City][State]

I am aware of [his/her] conviction for, and I have discussed rehabilitation progress during our monthly calls over the past two years. [Applicant Name] completed [relevant vocational training] in and holds current certifications in.[offense][year][list]

Upon verified release on parole, we will employ [him/her] as a [Job Title], full time, at \$ per hour, working. Duties will include [specific tasks]. Start date will be within business days of release, pending parole approval. [He/She] will report directly to me, and I will direct workplace supervision, regular performance reviews, and immediate reporting to the parole officer if attendance or conduct issues arise.[wage][schedule][number]

This offer is contingent on maintaining parole conditions and passing a standard drug screen. Please contact me at to verify employment details.[phone]

Sincerely,

[Printed Name, Title, Business Phone]

[Signature]

Template: Pastor or Community Mentor Letter

[Date]

New York State Board of Parole
[Full Board Address]

Re: Community Support for [Full Legal Name], DIN #[Number]

Dear Members of the Board:

My name is [Your Name], I serve as [Pastor, Mentor, Program Director] at [Organization Name] in, where I have served for

years. I have known [Applicant Name] for years through our prison ministry and reentry program.[City][State][number]

I meet with [him/her] for spiritual counseling and relapse prevention. Since, [he/she] has completed our [program name], attends weekly services, and now co-facilitates a victim awareness group. I have observed consistent accountability, remorse for the, and a commitment to making amends.[frequency][year][offense]

Our organization will provide structured support after release. This includes weekly mentoring sessions, transportation to treatment, enrollment in our job readiness workshop, and connection to sober housing resources at [address if applicable]. I will serve as a community accountability partner and will communicate with the assigned parole officer as needed.

I believe [Applicant Name] has demonstrated rehabilitation and presents a reduced risk with this support plan in place. I am available for verification at or.[phone][email]

Respectfully submitted,

[Printed Name, Credentials, Organization]

[Signature]

Sample Parole Board Letters

Strong family support letter example and why it works

March 12, 2026

Board of Parole Hearings
California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
P.O. Box ####, Sacramento, CA 95812

Re: Parole Support for James Carter, CDCR #AB1234, Hearing
April 22, 2026

Dear Honorable Board Members:

My name is Lisa Carter, I am the older sister of James Carter, and I live at 1234 Valencia Street, Sometown, CA. I have known James his entire life, and I have maintained weekly phone contact and monthly visits during his last five years at San Quentin.

I understand James was convicted of assault with a deadly weapon in 2017, and his actions caused lasting injury. He does not minimize this, and we have discussed his responsibility in our visits for the past three years.

During incarceration James completed Anger Management in 2021, Victim Awareness in 2022, and the Alternatives to Violence Project in 2023. He earned his GED in 2022, completed 240 hours of welding certification in 2024, and has had no serious rules violations for 38 months. He currently facilitates a weekly reentry readiness group.

If paroled, James will live with me and my husband in our two bedroom home at the address above. The home is substance free, and the home is ready for inspection at your convenience.. I will drive him to all parole appointments, to his counseling at Mission Recovery Center every Tuesday, and to work. We have written house rules: 9 p.m. curfew, no alcohol or weapons, mandatory AA attendance, and weekly family check-ins.

I will notify his parole officer immediately if he violates these rules. I am committed to this plan for at least the first year. You can reach me at (415) 555-0142 to verify.

I respectfully request that you grant parole to my brother James.

Sincerely,
Lisa Carter

Why this parole support letter works: It opens with full

identifying information for correct filing. It acknowledges the crime directly without excuses, which builds trustworthiness. It lists programs with dates and a 38 month clean disciplinary record, proving rehabilitation. The housing plan includes a verifiable street address, pre-approval status, transportation, treatment provider name, and specific accountability measures. The writer commits to reporting violations, which is what parole boards require from family sponsors.

Employer letter example with concrete job offer

Valley Precision Manufacturing
1780 Industrial Parkway, Fresno, CA 93721
March 5, 2026

Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles
1234 Shoal Creek Blvd, Austin, TX 76543

Re: Employment Offer for John Smith, TDCJ #01234567

To Whom It May Concern:

I am Robert Hayes, Production Manager at Valley Precision Manufacturing. I supervised John Smith as a machine operator for two years prior to his incarceration in 2019.

I am aware of John's conviction for burglary in 2019. We have spoken monthly for the past 18 months, and he has kept me updated on his progress. He completed CNC Operator Certification through the prison vocational program in 2024 and maintained perfect attendance in his work assignment in the prison metal shop for the last two years.

Upon John's arrival in California via an approved Interstate Compact transfer, we will hire him as a full time CNC Operator Apprentice at \$26.50 per hour, 40 hours per week, Monday

through Friday 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Start date will be within five business days of his release, pending parole transfer approval. He will report directly to me. Duties include machine setup, quality inspection, and safety compliance.

We provide on the job training, health benefits after 60 days, and structured supervision with documented 30, 60, and 90 day performance reviews. This offer is contingent on maintaining parole conditions and passing a standard drug screen. I will report any unexcused absences to his parole officer.

Please contact me at (559) 555-0298 to verify this offer.

Sincerely,
Robert Hayes
Production Manager

Why this employer parole board letter works: It is written on company letterhead by a direct supervisor with prior work history, which establishes expertise and authority. It states awareness of the conviction, avoiding any appearance of deception. The job offer is concrete and verifiable: exact job title, hourly wage, schedule, start timeline, supervisor name, and reporting duties. It includes accountability language about drug screening and reporting absences, which directly addresses public safety concerns. This level of detail is cited by parole boards as a primary factor in granting release for applicants with a solid employment plan.

How to Submit Your Letter Correctly

Parole boards update mailing addresses, email inboxes, and online portals regularly, and letters sent to an old address are often not filed. Always verify the current submission method on the official board website before you send, and include the incarcerated person's full legal name, state ID number, current facility, and hearing date in your cover

information. Keep a copy of everything you submit.

Mail, email, and online portal instructions

California: The Board of Parole Hearings posts its current correspondence instructions on its official site. Check the [Board of Parole Hearings contact page](#) for the mailing address, email for support and opposition letters, and any portal updates before submitting. While you may mail the Board directly, it is highly recommended to send a copy to the person's attorney, who will ensure the letter is formally submitted as part of the official evidentiary packet.

Texas: The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles does not accept support letters by email to individual panel members. Use the instructions published on the [TDCJ Support Letters FAQ page](#), which explains how to identify the specific Board Regional Office where your letter must be mailed.

New York: New York uses two accepted paths. Letters should be given to the Incarcerated Individual Rehabilitation Coordinator (IIRC) at the facility for placement in the case file, as described in the [DOCCS Parole Process guide](#). You may also use the official [Letters in Support or Opposition online form](#). Submit at least 30 days before the interview.

Federal: For U.S. Parole Commission cases, verify the current submission address on the [USPC official website](#) before mailing.

Proof of identity and notarization when required

Most boards do not require notarization for a standard character reference, but they do require that your identity be verifiable. Always include your full printed name, complete mailing address, phone number, email, and your relationship to

the applicant. Use employer letterhead for job offers and include credentials for clergy, counselors, or program providers.

Notarization is typically requested only when you are making a sworn claim that the board must verify, such as offering housing, pledging financial support, or submitting an affidavit of residence. In those cases, check the specific board's instructions linked above, do not sign until you are with the notary, and bring government-issued photo ID. If you attach a lease, utility bill, or other proof of residence, send clear copies, not originals, unless the board specifically asks for originals.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long should a parole board letter be?

Keep it to one page. Parole commissioners read hundreds of letters and scan for specific facts. If you are an employer, pastor, or treatment provider attaching a detailed plan, you may use up to two pages. Use 11 or 12 point font, single spacing, and business letter format. A concise parole support letter with verifiable details carries more weight than a long emotional narrative.

Can I email my parole support letter instead of mailing it?

It depends on the state. California accepts emailed letters through its correspondence unit, Texas requires mail to the designated Board Office handling the case, and New York prefers submission through the Offender Rehabilitation Coordinator or its online form. Because addresses and portals change, always verify the current method on the official board

website: [California BPH](#), [Texas BPP](#), [New York DOCCS](#), or [U.S. Parole Commission](#).

Do parole board letters need to be notarized?

Not usually. Most boards do not require notarization for a standard character reference. Notarization is recommended when you are making a sworn offer of housing, financial support, or employment that the board must verify, and some states require a notarized residency affidavit with proof of address. Include your full contact information in every letter so staff can verify your identity.

Who can write a parole board letter?

Family members, spouses, employers, coworkers, pastors, mentors, counselors, teachers, and community program providers can all write letters. The most persuasive writers have a long term relationship, firsthand knowledge of change, and a specific role after release. Boards give less weight to form letters, petitions, or letters from people who have never met the applicant in person.

What should I avoid saying in a parole board letter?

Never blame the victim, minimize the crime, attack the judge or prosecutor, or claim the person was railroaded. Do not promise 24 hour supervision or guaranteed sobriety, and do not submit twenty identical copy paste letters. These errors signal a lack of accountability and are frequently cited in denial decisions.

When should I send my parole support

letter?

Send it as soon as a hearing date is scheduled, and no later than 30 days before the hearing. California, Texas, and New York all need time to scan the letter into the central file and make it available to the panel. Late letters may not be reviewed. Check the current filing deadlines on your state's board site.

Can I write a parole board letter if I live out of state?

Yes. Out of state support is accepted and often helpful, especially for employment or family reunification plans. Clearly state your location, how you will maintain contact, and who will provide local assistance and transportation to help the individual meet their residency requirements. If you are offering housing, the board will still require the residence to be approved by the parole office in the receiving state through interstate compact.

Will the inmate see my letter?

Generally yes. In most states, support letters are placed in the non-confidential section of the case file and the incarcerated person can request a copy. Do not include sensitive personal information like your social security number, bank account details, or information you do not want shared. Keep your address and phone number included, because boards need it for verification.

How many parole support letters are needed?

Quality matters more than quantity. Three to five detailed, unique letters from different roles, for example family, employer, and counselor, are far stronger than twenty

identical form letters. The [Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles](#) specifically states that a few clear and concise letters are preferable to voluminous petitions.

Can I support parole if I am also the victim or victim's family?

Yes, and boards give significant weight to victim support when it is voluntary and acknowledges harm. If you are a victim or survivor choosing to support release, state your relationship to the case, that your support is freely given, and what accountability measures you expect. You may also submit a separate victim impact statement through the victim services office listed on your state's corrections website.