

VICTIM-SURVIVOR GUIDEBOOK

An Informational Guide to Pardon,
Commutation of Sentence,
& Parole Hearings for
Victims and Survivors of Crime

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I. INTRODUCTION

Dear Reader,

This guidebook is created by the **Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole**, and is intended for victims and survivors of crime. We hope this document helps you navigate the pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole processes. As you well know, crime can have a profound effect on your life, and its impact can be felt for years, or even a lifetime. The impact might be physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and/or spiritual. This is true for many people coping with the aftermath of harm, including victims, survivors, family, friends, community members, offenders, and others associated with both the harmed and responsible individuals.

While the information in this guidebook is geared towards victims and survivors, it may be useful to anyone interested in learning more about pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole proceedings. Our intention is to provide information in order to demystify the work of the Board of Pardons and Parole, clarify the services offered by the Louisiana Victim Outreach Program (LAVO) and the Crime Victims Services Bureau (CVSB), and inform you of the rights and roles of victims and survivor. Our aim is to extend compassion and help you gain greater peace of mind.

We understand the limitations of language. Louisiana law defines a *victim* in specific legal terms (**See page 4**), and as public agencies, the Board of Pardons and Parole, LAVO, and CVSB comply with this definition. At the same time, our society uses the terms *victim* and *survivor* in a variety of ways, and the preference for terms is often very personal. Generally speaking, a *victim* is considered a person who experienced harm first-hand, or whose family member experienced harm. A *survivor* is thought of as a person who was impacted by crime and remains alive, and/or who has gone through a recovery process after experiencing a crime. For the sake of this guidebook, we use both terms in an effort to be inclusive of anyone harmed by crime. We also use *harmed individual* as a general term because it emphasizes the individual aspect of crime. In a similar way, we use the terms *offender* and *responsible individual* when referring to a person who caused harm. Some people have a preference, and others use the terms interchangeably. All of these terms are limited in scope and can't begin to convey the true depth and complexity of a human experience. They also don't convey how each person's experience of harm and healing is personal and unique, and changes over time. *Please know that while the language is imperfect, our starting point is respect for you and your particular experience.*

It's normal to feel a wide range of emotions as you read through this guidebook, prepare for a hearing, and integrate a parole decision into your life. **At any time, if you or someone you care about has a question, would like to receive counseling or other healing services, or just wants to talk with a trained professional, please contact Victim Services.** We are ready to help.

Louisiana law [La. R.S. 46:1842(15)] and the Crime Victim Services Bureau's Department Regulation presently define a "victim" as:

A person against whom any of the following offenses have been committed:

- 1) Homicide;
- 2) Felony crime of violence defined or enumerated in La. R.S. 14:2(B), including convictions for attempts to commit those defined and enumerated crimes;
- 3) Sex offense or human-trafficking offense as defined or enumerated in La. R.S. 46:1844(W);
- 4) Vehicular negligent injuring;
- 5) First degree vehicular negligent injuring;
- 6) Offense committed against a family or household member;
- 7) Offense committed against a dating partner; or
- 8) A guilty verdict or a guilty plea or a no contest plea to reduced charges after the institution of a prosecution for any one of the above enumerated offenses. (DR PS-H-1).

II. WHAT IS THE LOUISIANA BOARD OF PARDONS AND COMMITTEE ON PAROLE?

The Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole is a government agency established to make fair and objective pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole decisions. In practical terms, this means that the Board of Pardons and Parole is in charge of determining – on a case-by-case basis -- if an incarcerated individual is prepared to leave prison before completing the full-term of their sentence in order to live as a member of mainstream society. The Board of Pardons and Parole works to ensure the public safety, health, and wellness of all the people it serves: the incarcerated person, the victim/survivor, and the community as a whole. As an independent agency, the Board of Pardons and Parole functions separately from the Department of Corrections, though the two agencies work in close collaboration.

The Board of Pardons and Parole is comprised of two entities: the *Board of Pardons*, and the *Committee on Parole*. All members are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Louisiana Senate. There are five members of the Board of Pardons, and they are the only individuals who can make pardon and commutation of sentence recommendations. The Committee on Parole includes the five Pardon Board members plus two at-large members, all of whom can make parole decisions. *For the sake of simplicity in this guidebook, we will refer to the both the Committee on Parole and/or the Pardon Board as the “Board.”*

Making parole and clemency recommendations and decisions requires careful consideration. The Board is trained to make decisions based on the values of ethics, integrity, equity, and innovation.

Mission: To serve the citizens of Louisiana through informed decision-making, thereby (1) promoting public safety, (2) addressing the needs of crime victims, and (3) facilitating successful reentry for offenders who have appropriately prepared for community supervision.

Vision: The Board will be guided by evidence-based principles in order to:

- Render just determination in regard to parole release and revocations, thereby maximizing the restoration of human potential
- Ensure crime victims have a voice in the decision-making process
- Use appropriate Department of Corrections and community resources to facilitate an offender's successful transition from confinement to the community
- Impose reasonable conditions of release consistent with the goal of structured reintegration of the offender
- Hold accountable those offenders who violate the conditions of release
- Foster a positive relationship with all stakeholders
- Administer the clemency process with recommendation to the Governor fully commensurate with public safety and due consideration
- Strive to be a continuously learning organization

For more information about the Louisiana Board of Pardons and Committee on Parole, visit www.doc.louisiana.gov/pardons-parole.

III. WHAT IS THE LOUISIANA VICTIM OUTREACH PROGRAM (LAVO)?

The **Louisiana Victim Outreach Program (LAVO)** is an initiative of the Board of Pardons and Parole. LAVO provides victims and survivors of violent offenses with educational and healing resources designed to help navigate the pardons and parole processes. Through a compassionate response to victims' needs, LAVO empowers victims and survivors through education; encourages healing through restorative programming; and grows a support system through state-wide outreach.

Education: Knowledge is important. LAVO provides notification about upcoming hearings before the Board of Pardons and Parole, information about statewide policies, and instruction about how the pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole processes work. This knowledge can help you feel more confident, lessen confusion about how parole decisions are made, and lead to greater ease throughout the process.

Healing: You deserve to heal from harm. Even if the harm was caused many years ago, it can have lasting effects. Healing is still possible. LAVO offers counseling, as well as a variety of other restorative practices, such as mindfulness, expressive arts, and compassion training.

Connection: There is a large victim/survivor community. Within this are people who represent a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and insights. LAVO brings harmed individuals, advocates, service providers, and community members together in order to strengthen connections that can lead to greater health and wholeness for everyone.

If you would like more information about any of the services above, please contact Victim Services.

IV. WHAT IS THE CRIME VICTIMS SERVICES BUREAU (CVSB)?

The Crime Victims Services Bureau (CVSB) is a program of the Louisiana Department of Public Safety and Corrections. CVSB was established in 1993 in response to legislation that requires certain notifications to crime victims. In 1995, it was made law that the Department of Corrections will maintain CVSB, thus guaranteeing critical services to victims. CVSB works closely with LAVO, the Board of Pardons and Parole, and other programs and agencies to ensure that the needs of victims and survivors are met. CVSB provides support and information at every stage of the post-conviction process, beginning at the time of sentencing. Services include:

Notification: CVSB notifies registered victims and survivors about where an offender is housed and their projected release date; court rulings that affect the length of sentencing; and an incarcerated person's release from prison for any reason, including death. Notifications about upcoming pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole hearings are handled by the Board of Pardons and Parole with support of LAVO. Once you have registered for notifications, CVSB and LAVO will both have access to your contact information. [\(See Section VIII\)](#)

Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD): VOD is a face-to-face meeting between the victim or survivor of a crime and the person who committed the crime. It's a cautious process that was created in response to requests from victims to talk directly with the offenders who had harmed them. It is designed to be a safe way for victims and survivors and offenders to prepare for and have such a meeting. Please note: the timing of the VOD process cannot overlap with a pardon or parole hearing, so it should be completed before the hearing date. [\(See Section XVIII\)](#)

Accountability Letter Bank: CVSB holds all accountability letters written by offenders until registered victims and survivors request to see them. An accountability letter is a letter written by an offender in order to express responsibility and remorse for the harm they committed. Offenders who have participated in a victim awareness training are eligible to write a letter. Program space is limited, and trainings are not offered at every correctional facility. Therefore, registering to receive an accountability letter does not guarantee that the offender in your case has had the opportunity to write one. [\(See Section XVII\)](#)

Victim Impact and Reentry Statement: Victims and survivors have the right to speak about the effects of the crime they experienced. A Victim Impact and Reentry Statement is a structured way for you to voice your feelings and wishes. Statements may be submitted before the hearing online, by mail, or by video, and may also be read at the hearing. [\(See Section XV\)](#)

Other Services: Other assistance available for victims, survivors, and their families includes:

- Current photograph of offender. May be requested by registered victims within three months of an offender's earliest projected release date.
- Access to information included in the offender's post sentence report (limited access).
- Help in halting unsolicited communications from offenders.
- Referrals to other agencies and organizations.
- Opportunities to suggest actions to make the agency more "victim friendly."

V. WHAT ARE THE RIGHTS OF VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS?

The Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole *involves* victims and survivors in the process at all times. It considers victims and survivors to be integral *partners*, and sees them as *unique* individuals with varied and distinct concerns and points of view. The Board of Pardons and Parole, CVSB, and LAVO work to ensure victims' *safety*, and offer trauma-informed services in order to assist victims and survivors in *healing* from the effects of crime.

The Louisiana Crime Victims' Rights Laws specify the following rights for victims:

- Victims have the right to be treated with *fairness, dignity, and respect*.
- Victims have the right to be *heard* and allowed to speak for themselves about the impact of crime.
- Victims have the right to be *present* in pardon, parole, and reentry processes.
- Victims have the right to be *informed* through consistent, reliable, and easy access to information.
- Victims have the right to be *notified* of proceedings that affect them.
- Victims have the right to seek *restitution* for damages and losses.

VI. WHAT IS TRAUMA?

Trauma is an emotional response to a deeply distressing event. Trauma can affect you physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

A traumatic event is one that causes death, the threat of death, serious injury, sexual harm, or exposure to dangerous substances. A traumatic event can be something you witness, experience directly, cause, or are affected by because it happens to someone you care about. Trauma can be caused by a natural disaster, war, accident, intentional action, or other form of violence.

The effect of trauma is different for each person. Sometimes trauma has a short-term effect. In this case, you're able to make sense of the experience, integrate it into your life, and cope with your thoughts and feelings about the experience.

Other times, it's harder to cope and trauma has a long-term effect. In this case, you might experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which means you have trouble feeling in control, and have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings about the experience long after the event is over.

People with PTSD might experience the following:

Flashbacks	Nightmares
Sense of isolation	Emotional outbursts
Self-destructive behavior	Memory problems
Hopelessness and apathy	Emotional numbness
Easily triggered	Problems concentrating
Guilt or shame	Depression
Suicidal thoughts	Avoidance of people or places

PTSD can affect people of any age, gender, ethnicity, nationality, culture, religion, socioeconomic status, level of education, etc. According to the American Psychiatric Association:

- PTSD affects approximately 3.5 percent of adults in the United States
- 1 in 11 people will be diagnosed PTSD in their lifetime
- Women are twice as likely as men to experience PTSD

For more information about trauma or PTSD, visit the American Psychiatric Association webpage at www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd

VII. IS THE BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLE TRAINED TO ADDRESS TRAUMA?

The Board of Pardons and Parole is trained and committed to holding hearings that are people-centered, trauma-informed, and responsive to the needs of everyone involved.

Crime can be traumatic for everyone impacted by the event: the victim/survivor, offender, friends and family members, law enforcement and first responders, and others. Years later, a pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole hearing can trigger memories of the event, and can feel re-traumatizing. For this reason, the Board of Pardons and Parole, along with Victim Services, works to create an environment that is respectful of each person in the room and that honors the importance of the proceedings.

The Board of Pardons and Parole strives to:

- Treat each person as an **individual**
- **Understand** and validate feelings and experiences
- Meet **physical needs** (water, bathroom, etc.)
- **Explain** processes, expectations, and outcomes
- Offer **options**, choices and alternatives
- Keep appropriate **boundaries**
- Establish consistent **guidelines**
- **Pause** to regroup as necessary
- **Ask** participants what will help

VIII. HOW DO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS REGISTER FOR NOTIFICATIONS?

It is your right to be informed of any proceedings that relate to your case. In fact, by law victims must be notified of upcoming trials, and pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole hearings. The Board of Pardons and Parole works with the Louisiana Victim Outreach Program (LAVO) and the Crime Victim Services Bureau (CVSB) to provide a timely, victim-sensitive, clearly delineated notification system. This includes sending a letter to victims and survivors at least 3 months prior to the hearing date, offering support services, and providing assistance with parole hearing preparations, including how to write a “Victim Impact and Reentry Statement.” (See [Section XV](#))

Victims and survivors who register with CVSB will be notified of the following events:

- Initial housing location and projected release dates
- Court ruling affecting sentence length
- Scheduled hearing before the Board of Pardons or Committee on Parole
- Escape from institutional custody and apprehension
- Assignment to Transitional Work Program
- Release from prison by any means, including death

IMPORTANT: The first step is to register for notifications. If you wish to stay informed about an incarcerated person’s custody status you must **register in TWO places: (1) with the national VINE network, and (2) with the Crime Victim Services Bureau (CVSB).** At this date, there is not a one-step registration process, so it’s crucial that you register in both places to ensure that you receive the information you want and deserve. Registration is confidential and free.

The Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole relies on both VINE and CVSB for current contact information. Every reasonable effort is made to contact victims and survivors about relevant hearings. However, if someone is not registered, it becomes very difficult to reach them. The Board of Pardons and Parole staff has little to go on, often resorting to attempting to find contact information through original court documents or conducting other research. Even with these efforts, the Board of Pardons and Parole cannot guarantee it will be successful, especially if the victim or survivor has moved or changed their name. There have also been cases in which one family member registered but did not communicate the notification information to other family members. For these reasons, **it’s extremely important that you personally register and update your contact information if it changes for any reason.**

- 1. Register with the Victim Information and Notification Everyday (VINE) network.** VINE is a national network that provides custody status and criminal case information. **Call: (866) 277-7477 (Press “Option 2”).** www.vinelink.com
- 2. Register with the Crime Victim Services Bureau (CVSB).** CVSB manages the notification system that works specifically with the Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole. **Call: (225) 342-1056.** www.doc.louisiana.gov/victim-services

IX. WHO MAY VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS CONTACT TO DISCUSS A CASE?

There are clear protocols regarding who may be contacted to discuss a case involving pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole.

Victims and survivors *are encouraged* to contact the Louisiana Victim Outreach Program (LAVO) or the Crime Victim Services Bureau (CVSB) in order to receive information, support, and resources. The professionals who run these programs work together and can direct you to the resources that are right for your specific needs. **They can both be reached through the main Victim Services number at (225) 342-1056.** This should be the first point of contact.

Anyone who wishes to communicate with the Board of Pardons and Parole *may* do so through an open meeting, or through a letter addressed to the Board of Pardons and Parole (see address below). In most cases, written communication to the Board is deemed a public record and can be subject to public inspection.

Victims and survivors *may* voice their feelings or state their needs regarding a specific pardon or parole case by submitting a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement ([see Section XV](#)).

By law, the seven Board members *may not* be directly contacted to discuss any case. This means that victims, survivors, family members, friends, advocates, law enforcement, and members of the community are strictly prohibited from any form of communication with individual Board members about an upcoming hearing or a hearing that has already taken place (including phone, text, email, social media, mail, or in-person conversations). This rule is intended to maintain a healthy division between the members of the Board of Pardons and Parole and the public in order to ensure a fair and equitable process for everyone.

While contact with individual Board members is prohibited, staff members *are* permitted to assist the public with general questions. However, it is recommended that victims and survivors first reach out to Victim Services.

Mailing Address:
Board of Pardons and Parole Office
P.O. Box 94304
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
(225) 342-6622

Or contact Victim Services.

X. UNDERSTANDING THE TERMS: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN REENTRY, CLEMENCY, PARDON, COMMUTATION OF SENTENCE, PAROLE, PROBATION, AND PAROLE REVOCATION?

These terms can be confusing, especially since many people use the terms interchangeably. However, each of these terms is distinct and describes a specific aspect of the reentry process.

Reentry is a broad term that describes the process of a formerly incarcerated person transitioning back to the larger community. In other words, reentry refers to a person leaving prison and going “home,” even if “home” is not the same house, town, or state where they lived before they were incarcerated. The term applies to people who are reentering society and will remain under community supervision (parole), as well as to people who completed the full-term of their sentence and are therefore transitioning back into mainstream society with no parole restrictions.

Clemency means “mercy” or “leniency.” Within the law, clemency is a general term for legal decisions that reduce a sentence, or in some cases overturn a conviction. Often called “executive clemency,” these decisions are typically made or approved by the Governor. The Board of Pardons oversees clemency hearings. Both a pardon and a commutation of sentence are examples of clemency.

Pardon is the “forgiving” of a conviction, not in emotional terms but in legal terms. While the conviction remains on the person’s record, a pardon relieves the person from the restrictions and limitations of other formerly incarcerated people. Pardons require both a recommendation from the Board of Pardons, and the approval of the Governor. A person applies for pardon after they have already been released from prison in order to restore certain civil rights, such as buying or owning a weapon, holding particular jobs, or restoring voting rights. Most pardons are granted to restore rights to a person who is deemed rehabilitated. In rare cases, pardons are granted because the person was found to be wrongfully convicted.

Commutation of sentence is the legal adjustment of a sentence. Commutations reduce or modify a sentence to a lesser sentence. While any offender can apply for commutation, this is most often utilized by inmates who have a life sentence without the possibility of parole who are requesting to reduce the sentence to a fixed number of years, thereby making them eligible for parole release consideration.

For example, a person who has been incarcerated 25 years on a sentence of life without parole might have their sentence commuted to 99 years with immediate parole eligibility. Being eligible for parole does not guarantee they will be granted parole; it means they may receive a hearing before the Committee on Parole. Commuting a life sentence to a number of years may also make the offender eligible for a Good-Time release date (**See Section XI**). It is important to note that parole release is at the discretion of the Committee on Parole, while the amount of good-time credit an incarcerated person may earn is mandated by law.

Parole releases incarcerated individuals with fixed-term sentences (“number sentences”) from prison before the full term of their sentence is over. Parole is not guaranteed. It is a privilege not a right, and there are different pathways to parole ([See Section XI](#)). If parole is granted, it is part of the offender’s sentence; they serve this portion of their sentence while living in mainstream society under the supervision and guidance of the Department of Corrections.

For example, if a person is sentenced to ten years in prison, they might be released on parole after eight years and remain under the supervision of a parole officer for the final two years of their sentence.

Probation is a period of community supervision that’s ordered by the court instead of sentencing a person to prison. The Board of Pardons and Parole does not oversee cases involving probation.

Parole Revocation is the removal of parole benefits. If a parolee (someone currently on parole) breaks the rules of parole, doesn’t comply with their parole conditions, or commits another crime, their parole can be revoked (taken away). In this case, there is a Parole Revocation Hearing to determine if the person can remain on parole with additional restrictions and conditions, or if they must return to prison to serve the remainder of their sentence.

In all cases, the Board of Pardons and Parole notifies victims and survivors *who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau* about pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole hearings. ([See Section VIII](#))

Victims and survivors are always invited to submit a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement, and/or speak to the Board at the pardon or parole hearing. ([See Section XV](#))

XI. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT PATHWAYS TO REENTRY?

Many victims and survivors are surprised to learn that the original sentence an offender receives is not necessarily what they will actually serve. Once an offender is convicted of a crime and sentenced to prison, there are many laws that provide the right to appeal the sentence through the courts, or to apply for early release based on rehabilitation while in prison. Outside of going through an appeals process in a court hearing, the following are the most common pathways that an incarcerated person has for returning to mainstream society.

- 1. Full Term Release: The incarcerated person completes the full term of their sentence.** If someone is sentenced to serve a fixed number of years in prison (“number sentence”), they are released at the end of their full term. For example, a person sentenced to serve ten years in prison is automatically released at the end of ten years. At this time, their sentence is complete and they are no longer under the supervision of the Department of Corrections. They are **not on parole and do not have to follow any parole conditions**. However, they are not necessarily granted full privileges of living in society. Depending on the nature of their conviction (i.e. violent offense, sex crime, drug offense, etc.), they may have restrictions on certain civil rights, including restrictions against buying or owning a weapon, holding specific jobs, securing parental rights, and traveling abroad.

When a person returns home after serving their full sentence, victims and survivors who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau are notified.

- 2. Parole Eligibility: The incarcerated person is eligible to be consider for reentry into society and will complete the remainder of their sentence under the supervision of the Department of Corrections’ Office of Probation & Parole.**

Parole may be granted through a parole hearing conducted by the Board of Pardons and Parole. Offenders can become eligible for parole in different ways: based on a parole date set at the time of their original sentencing; earning good-time credit; receiving a commutation of sentence; being recommended for a medical release; or due to a change in national or state legislation. (Please note, each of these is explained in more detail in the following pages).

Most often, parole eligibility is determined at the time of sentencing and is generally the earliest possible date an incarcerated person can be released.

Setting the parole eligibility date on an original sentence is not an arbitrary process. When a person is convicted of a crime, they are sentenced by the judge. At that time, a parole date is determined based on a Sentencing Structure that is set by the laws of the state of Louisiana. One offender might be required to serve 25% of their full term, while another is required to serve 85% of their full term. The formula is based on the type of crime, conviction date, and current laws of sentencing. As laws change, the formula changes, so the formula used in 1990 is not the same formula used in 2010, nor is the formula used today likely to be the same in another ten years.

Incarcerated individuals who are eligible for parole may be scheduled for a parole hearing up to six months in advance of their parole eligibility date. A parole hearing is a hearing before the Committee on Parole to determine whether the offender is ready to safely reenter mainstream society as a productive member. Just because an offender is scheduled for a parole hearing does not mean they will be released on parole. Parole release is at the sole discretion of the Committee on Parole panel considering each individual case. The Committee on Parole considers a wide range of factors to determine whether the incarcerated person is suitable for parole ([See Section XIII](#)). If they are deemed suitable, they are released from prison and remain under the supervision of the Department of Corrections for the remainder of their sentence.

No one, regardless of how they become eligible (commutation of sentence, change in laws, medical condition, or original sentence) is guaranteed parole. It's possible for someone with parole eligibility to remain in prison for the full term of their sentence. In some cases, this means for the remainder of their natural life. Many offenders have several parole hearings before they are found suitable for parole release. Offenders can be denied parole for up to two years at a time. If denied, it is their legal right to request another parole hearing.

Victims and survivors who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau are notified of the upcoming hearing, and invited to submit a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement ([See Section XV](#)), and/or speak to the Board at the hearing.

3. Good-Time Release: almost all offenses have good time release eligibility built into the sentence, mandated by LA legislation.

The incarcerated person earns good-time credit while in prison, which reduces the amount of time they remain incarcerated. Good-time credit is earned by exemplary behavior and the completion of drug, work, or educational programming. Not all offenders are eligible for a good-time release date, and they must have a “number sentence” to even be considered. People serving life sentences are not eligible for good-time credit unless their sentence is commuted to a “number sentence,” or as the result of new laws.

GTPS: Good Time Parole Supervision. Under the supervision of the Board.

For eligible offenders, good-time credit is earned by completing Certified Treatment and Rehabilitation Programs (CTRP) such as Alcohol or Narcotics Anonymous (AA or NA), Anger Management Programs, Victim Awareness Classes, and other approved rehabilitative programming ([See Section XIX](#)).

The amount of good-time an incarcerated person can earn is set by law. To determine a person's good-time release date from prison, the Department of Corrections follows a Sentencing Structure based on the year the person was convicted, the nature of the crime, and the number of good-time credits.

For example, if someone was sentenced to ten years in prison and earned six months of good-time credit, they would return to society after 9 ½ years in prison. Even though an offender might earn good time credit, early release from prison is not guaranteed. If the Committee on Parole grants release, they **remain on parole for the duration of their original sentence and must follow whatever parole conditions are set by the Committee**. In addition, depending on the nature of their conviction (i.e. violent offense, sex crime, drug offense, etc.), they may have restrictions on certain civil rights, including restrictions against buying or owning a weapon, holding specific jobs, securing parental rights, and traveling abroad.

Victims and survivors who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau are notified of the upcoming hearing, and invited to submit a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement (**See Section XV**), and/or speak to the Board at the hearing.

4. Medical Release: The incarcerated person is released from prison for medical reasons through a medical treatment furlough, medical parole, or compassionate release program.

Incarcerated individuals who are suffering from medical conditions may be eligible for medical release.

An incarcerated person with a terminal medical condition (such as dementia or advanced-stage cancer) or permanent disability can be considered for a *medical treatment furlough*. Medical treatment furlough is typically granted to inmates who are not expected to recover from their illness and who are not considered a threat to public safety. Individuals on medical treatment furlough are assigned to an approved medical facility and supervised by a parole officer. If the inmate does recover, they are sent back to prison for the duration of their sentence.

Medical parole is a program that allows incarcerated individuals to be permanently released if they're sick or disabled, and they are not restricted to residing in a medical facility. This program is not available to individuals convicted of murder.

Medical treatment furlough and medical parole are forms of parole and are therefore determined in a hearing conducted by the Committee on Parole.

Compassionate release is a type of medical release typically granted to incarcerated people who are in need of hospice care and have a short life expectancy. Compassionate release is determined by the Secretary of Corrections through a process that includes a medical professionals and security staff.

Victims and survivors who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau are notified of the upcoming hearings, and invited to submit a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement (**See Section XV**), and/or speak to the Board at the hearing.

5. Transitional Work Program: The incarcerated person is housed for the remainder of their sentence in a structured program designed to help them reenter the work force.

Certain eligible offenders enter a Transitional Work Program (TWP) anywhere from six months to four years before their full-term release date from prison. Eligibility depends on the type of crime and conviction (most sex offenders are not eligible to participate) and includes a set of criteria determined by the Department of Corrections. Incarcerated individuals who are part of the program work at an approved job, and live at an assigned facility where there is structure and supervision by security staff. Transitional Work Programs help individuals succeed in the transition from prison back into the work force, and many offenders keep their same job after release from the program. Because TWP participants are earning a salary, they are also better able to pay victim restitution, child support, court costs and fines.

In some cases, the Board requires 6 – 9 months of successful participation in TWP as a condition of parole release. Those that the Department of Corrections sends to TWP can remain in the program until their earliest release date.

Victims and survivors who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau are notified of upcoming hearings, and invited to submit a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement ([See Section XV](#)), and/or speak to the Board at the hearing.

6. Commutation of Sentence: The incarcerated person receives a reduction in their sentence based on a favorable recommendation by the Pardon Board and the approval of the Governor.

An incarcerated person whose sentence is reduced or modified can become eligible for parole. Once the Governor approves the Pardon Board's recommendation for commutation, and the incarcerated person meets all other eligibility requirements, they are scheduled for a parole hearing.

Any incarcerated person has the legal right to apply for commutation of sentence through the Pardon Board. This process has multiple steps. The offender must first submit an application to the Pardon Board requesting a Commutation of Sentence hearing. The application includes the individual's disciplinary record; work history; certificates of completion for vocational, educational or rehabilitative programs; letters of support; and a personal statement. The Pardon Board reviews the application and, if it determines that the application has merit, a hearing is scheduled and an extensive clemency investigation is conducted. (Please note: This terminology can be confusing because the offender is not actually being considered for a pardon, but for commutation of sentence).

As a result of the hearing, if the Pardon Board recommends a commutation, the recommendation is sent to the Governor for review. There is no time limit to the Governor signing the recommendation; it could be signed within the Governor's term, it could be held over to the next Governor, or it may be denied. If the Governor signs the

commutation, the offender then follows the conditions of the new sentence, which may include, but is not limited to, parole eligibility and/or applicable Good Time calculation.

For example, if an offender's sentence is commuted from life without parole to 99 years with immediate parole eligibility, the offender would return to the Committee on Parole for a parole hearing to determine readiness to reenter society. If granted parole, the person would remain under supervision of the Department of Corrections for the remainder of their sentence. In this example, if the offender had already served 25 years in prison, they would return to society on parole for the next 74 years in order to complete their 99-year sentence.

Victims and survivors who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau are notified of the hearing for commutation, and (if the commutation is granted by the Governor) of the subsequent parole hearing. If they wish to share their experiences and voice their feelings, they are invited to submit a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement ([See Section XV](#)), and/or speak to the Board at the hearing.

7. New Legislation: The incarcerated person becomes eligible for parole or a reduction of sentence based on new federal or state laws.

As society's beliefs and values about incarceration change, new legislation can result in certain populations of incarcerated people becoming eligible for reentry to mainstream society. For example, recent national and state legislation banned life sentences without parole for all juvenile offenders. In Louisiana, this resulted in a new law giving parole consideration to juvenile offenders who meet all the criteria, including serving at least 25 years of incarceration and completing rehabilitative programming. Incarcerated individuals in this class of offender are automatically scheduled for a parole hearing as soon as they meet the eligibility criteria.

Because legislation can change, it's important to stay informed through news sources, the Louisiana Department of Corrections website (www.doc.louisiana.gov), and criminal justice-related informational events, including those hosted by the Board of Pardons and Parole.

If you have a specific question about a change in state legislation, please reach out to Victim Services.

XII. WHAT HAPPENS DURING A PARDON, COMMUTATION OF SENTENCE, OR PAROLE HEARING?

Please note. The information below applies to in person hearings. In accordance with Executive Proclamations JBE 20-30 and JBE 20-33, issued on March 16, 2020 and March 22, 2020, respectively, pardon and parole hearings will be conducted utilizing video conferencing technology during the pendency of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The hearings will be conducted using ZOOM Video Conferencing that will allow for observation and comment by members of the public. Please see pages 38-39 for more information.

The Board of Pardons and Parole is entrusted to ensure public safety and public health. The purpose of a hearing is to determine if or when an incarcerated individual may reenter society. Hearings are made public so that all interested citizens can participate in or witness the process.

Most hearings are “remote,” meaning the public portion of the hearings takes place at the Department of Corrections Headquarters in Baton Rouge in the Parole Hearing Conference Room, while the offenders are televised into the room from the remote locations of the prison facilities. In remote hearings, victims and survivors attend hearings in Baton Rouge, and have the opportunity to deliver their Victim Impact and Reentry Statement in person to the Board (**See Section XV**).

Occasionally, the Board conducts “live hearings,” which means Board members travel to the prison facilities where the offenders are incarcerated or to other state institutions (such as universities, state offices, etc.) to hold the hearings at those locations.

For live hearings, victims and survivors typically still participate from the Parole Hearing Conference Room in Baton Rouge, and are televised into the proceedings at the prison or state facility. Victims and survivors are never required to travel to a prison for a hearing. However, if they would prefer to attend the “live hearing” they may request to do so. Alternately, victims and survivors may choose to participate by telephone from their local District Attorney's office. **It is very important that victims and survivors give advance notice of their wishes to participate by telephone. Please contact the Board of Pardons and Parole, or Victim Services, so that appropriate accommodations can be made.**

Since the majority of hearings are held in the Parole Hearing Conference Room in Baton Rouge, the following is a description of what to expect at that venue:

On the day of the hearing, members of the public arrive at the Department of Corrections Headquarters located at 601 South Blvd, Baton Rouge, LA, 70802. Parking is available in the large parking lot. There are signs directing the way to the Parole Hearing Conference Room.

All guests must report to the Security Office located just inside the main entrance gate, show ID, go through security screening, and then proceed to the hearing room (**See Section XXI**). Please note that armed security officers are present in order to ensure safety and offer direction. There are often many people in the hallway outside the hearing room, as there are multiple hearings

held on any given day. Those individuals might be family members, friends, or advocates of an incarcerated person; law enforcement; lawyers; other victims and survivors and their advocates; or other interested citizens. In rare cases, news media might attend.

Victims and survivors are invited to wait in a closed conference room in order to provide them with privacy. Other members of the public wait in chairs that line the hallway until their specific hearing is called. Please note that the hearing room is relatively small; therefore, the number of people allowed to attend the hearing may be limited due to space and security considerations. When victims and survivors arrive, they are met and accompanied by a victim advocate from LAVO or CVSB. The advocate explains what to expect during the hearing, and makes sure the victims and survivors are as comfortable and prepared as possible.

When the hearing is about to begin, victims and survivors are invited to enter the hearing room before anyone else. The room is set up much like a courtroom. Board members sit on a raised platform behind a wooden “bench” similar to a judge’s platform. Chairs are set up on both sides of the room facing the middle. From the Board’s point of view, the seating on the right is for people in support of the offender’s reentry to society; seating on the left is for victims and survivors, regardless of whether they are supporting or opposing reentry.

A video screen is mounted on the back wall, facing the Board members, which projects a live video-feed of the incarcerated person whose case is being considered, much like a Skype, FaceTime, or Zoom call. The incarcerated person is always accompanied by a warden or other representative of the prison. Often they also have family members, friends, or other advocates beside them in the room. They are visible on the video screen at all times during the hearing.

Before the day of the hearing, the Board will have reviewed the incarcerated person’s file. The file contains information such as the individual’s crime and conviction; disciplinary record; mental and medical health record; risk assessment; history of educational, vocational, and/or rehabilitative programming; employment and housing plan; letters of support; and, if submitted, a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement. During the hearing, Board members might ask the incarcerated person questions about what’s in the file, or about anything else they think will help them make an informed decision.

On any given day, there is an assigned Panel Chairperson. The Chairperson is a member of the Board who facilitates the steps of the hearing, and announces the decision of the panel after all panel members have voted.

The Panel Chairperson will facilitate the following initial review:

- Welcome everyone in attendance
- Ask each person in the room to introduce themselves and their relationship to the crime or the incarcerated individual
- Review the steps of the hearing process
- Confirm the original crime and sentencing dates
- Ask the offender about any pre-crime life factors

- Review the offender's incarceration record, including achievements and disciplinary record
- Confirm the incarcerated individual's parole plans, including housing, employment, and continued rehabilitation
- Review the Victim Impact and Reentry Statement

After the review, the Board invites up to three verbal statements from victims or survivors (or a designated representative) who wish to speak about the impact of the crime or who wish to request special conditions placed on parole (**See Section XVI**). The Board then hears up to three verbal statements from people who have current knowledge of the incarcerated individual's accomplishments and readiness to return home. In addition, the Board hears a statement from the Warden or representative of the prison.

There is a podium at the center of the hearing room, facing the Board members. When anyone speaks, they stand at the podium and speak directly to the Board members. The video screen is behind the podium, and the person speaking is not able to see the offender. Please note: Board members are the only people allowed to speak directly to the offender or to another person in the room.

After all the statements are made, the incarcerated person is invited to make a final statement. They are only allowed to address Board members, and may not speak directly to victims or survivors. For everyone involved, keeping statements directed to Board members helps maintain order and civility, and maintains the focus on productive input.

The Board then deliberates and makes a final decision. Each member of the Board panel announces their vote and their reasons. Then the Panel Chairperson announces the final result, which is put into the official record before anyone leaves the hearing room.

A hearing can be a highly emotional experience for everyone involved, and there are often people in the room advocating for opposing outcomes. The Board is very careful with its decisions, and is trained to remain calm, balanced, and fair. While its decisions might be celebrated by some people in the room, other people might feel upset or disappointed by its decisions. For example, there could be a case in which the mother of the offender is supporting her son's release, while the mother of the victim is opposing his release. When both mothers are in the same room, it can be a highly sensitive environment. All effort is made by the Board of Pardons and Parole and its staff to respect the full range of emotional needs and responses that are present.

If you would like follow-up services, please contact Victim Services for individualized support or counseling, or for recommendations for other appropriate resources.

XIII. WHAT FACTORS ARE CONSIDERED DURING A HEARING?

To make a fair decision during a pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole hearing, the Board must consider many factors. These factors determine both the outcome of the hearing, and whether or not there are special conditions placed on the parole decision.

The goal of a pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole hearing is not to decide guilt or innocence of the crime. The Board accepts as fact the guilty verdict imposed by the courts. The purpose of a hearing is to determine if or when an incarcerated person may return safely to mainstream society. The Board always holds the safety and health of the public as its main concern.

Some of the factors considered by the panel which may be discussed in the hearing include:

- **Conduct in prison:** This may include disciplinary reports (“write-up,” or “DB Report”) as well as successes and accolades.
- **Letters of support or opposition:** This may include personal, professional, and community statements regarding the individual’s possible return to mainstream society.
- **Victim Impact and Reentry Statement:** This may include a description of the short- and long-term impact of the crime, and can be a written or verbal statement (**See Section XV**). Victims and survivors are also encouraged to voice their wishes for individualized parole conditions (**See Section XVI**).
- **Vocational and educational accomplishments in prison:** This may include earning a GED or a college degree, becoming certified in a vocational trade, or other accomplishments related to developing skills for employment.
- **Involvement in self-help therapy programs:** This may include completion of any rehabilitative programming designed to strengthen skills that lead to healthy personal choices, improved connections, and enhanced well-being for self and others. Programs can range from recovery programs for drugs and alcohol, to anger management, to victim awareness. (**See Section XIX**)
- **TIGER Assessment Scores:** Targeting Enhancements Gaining Enhanced Reentry (TIGER) is a tool to assess the risk of re-offending, and to determine if incarcerated individuals may need support after reentry, including mental health, substance abuse, and other resources that would further reduce the risk of recidivism.
- **Static99 Assessment Score:** A risk assessment for use with adult male sexual offenders.
- **Parole plans:** This may include plans for employment, housing, mental health, and other supports if the incarcerated person were to be released.
- **Community service work performed while in prison.**

XIV. ARE HEARING DECISIONS FINAL?

The decisions of the Board are final. There is no appeals process. However, if denied, offenders have a constitutional right to request another hearing after a set amount of time has passed (usually several years). Many incarcerated individuals have more than one hearing before they are found suitable for reentry to mainstream society.

In rare cases, the Board will reconsider a decision. While technically not an appeal, a reconsideration is an avenue for offenders to receive another hearing in *parole* cases only. Reconsideration review is at the discretion of the Committee on Parole, and is only available for the following reasons: misconduct by a Committee member; significant procedural error by a Committee member; or significant new evidence that wasn't available when the hearing was conducted.

Victims and survivors might have strong emotions after a hearing. This is normal. They might have feelings about seeing or listening to the offender, especially if they haven't had contact for years or decades, or if the offender is also a family member. Victims and survivors might have feelings about the statements given during the hearing. Depending on the outcome of the hearing, they might feel disappointment, anger, joy, or peace. Often victims and survivors feel a complicated (and sometimes confusing) mixture of emotions. For incarcerated individuals and the people who support them, it is also an emotional time, for many of the same reasons.

There are several possible next steps after a hearing decision:

- If a pardon or commutation of sentence is recommended, the decision is sent to the Governor's office for review. If the Governor signs the pardon there is no further action needed. If the Governor signs the commutation of sentence, the offender is then eligible for a parole hearing. (**See Section XI**)
- If a pardon or commutation of sentence is not recommended by the Board, the offender has the right to reapply after three years.
- If parole is granted and the offender has met their parole eligibility date, they immediately begin the process for release.
- If parole is granted before the offender's parole eligibility date, they remain in prison until that date.
- If parole is denied, it will be denied for a specific period of time. Typically, the waiting period before an offender can request a new hearing is two years, though this may vary.

If granted parole, the parolee will be supervised by the Division of Probation and Parole for the duration of their original sentence. Parole officers help the parolee readjust to mainstream society, and hold them accountable for their actions. Visit the DOC website for location and contact information of Probation and Parole offices, <http://www.doc.la.gov/pages/probation-parole/district-offices/>.

XV. WHAT IS A VICTIM IMPACT AND REENTRY STATEMENT?

Victims and survivors, members of their family, or designated representatives have the right to attend the hearing of the person responsible for their harm, and to speak about the effects of the crime they experienced. Victims and survivors may express their opposition or support of the offender's reentry to society.

A Victim Impact and Reentry Statement is a structured way for victims and survivors to voice their feelings and wishes, and is an important component of the Board's decision. Victims and survivors help the Board understand the impact of crime, and what is needed to restore the health and wellness of the harmed individual, family, and community. In practical terms, this input is used by the Board to inform parole conditions, which are the rules and requirements placed on an offender if they are granted parole. These conditions can enhance public health, safety, and peace of mind. (See Section XVI)

A Victim Impact and Reentry Statement should be a written or oral description of the physical, financial, emotional, and/or spiritual effects of a crime on an individual, family, or community. Victims and survivors and their families should express how the crime has personally affected them from an emotional or psychological standpoint.

1. Victim Impact and Reentry Statements may be submitted before the hearing online, by mail, or by audio or video. Only one impact statement per person is allowed, but there is no limit to the number of directly impacted people who can submit statements. **Please submit Impact Statements at least 2 weeks before the scheduled hearing.** This ensures the Board has time to carefully review the statements.
2. Impact Statements may also be read in person during the hearing. **Victims and survivors should notify the Board of Pardons and Parole or Victim Services if they intend to appear at a hearing.** During a hearing, up to three victims or survivors may address the Board, preferably in the following order of priority:
 - Spouse (including domestic partners)
 - Children (over the age of 12)
 - Parents
 - Siblings
 - Grandchildren and Grandparents
 - Selected representative

The following three pages (pages 26 – 28) offer more information about creating and submitting a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement. This information can also be found online at <https://www.doc.la.gov/victim-services/>.

If you would like guidance or support in submitting a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement, please contact Victim Services.



Guide for Victim Impact and Reentry Statement

Please complete this cover sheet, and submit it with your statement
Impact and reentry statements are voluntary

Offender Information

Offender's Name _____

DOC# _____

Parole Hearing Date _____

(Statement must be received **at least 14 days in advance** of the scheduled parole hearing.)

Victim Information

Victim's Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Do you wish for your Victim Impact and Reentry Statement to remain confidential?

(Written, audio, or video statements marked CONFIDENTIAL are shared only with the Board of Pardons and Parole staff and Board members, and are not shared with the offender and his/her attorney. Please note that if you choose for your statement to remain confidential, it cannot be read into the official record during the parole hearing.)

Yes, I wish for my statement to remain confidential _____

No, my statement does not need to remain confidential and can be shared _____

Victim Impact and Reentry Statement

The submission of a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement is a voluntary right for people harmed by crime. The purpose is to help the Board of Pardons and Parole understand how a crime has affected you, and what special parole conditions you may want to request. The Board understands there are many ways to feel. The impact of crime is different for every harmed-person, and can change over the years in ways that range from devastating to transformative. Please describe the full range of (and sometimes contradictory) ways you have been impacted. Rather than advocate for a specific outcome or approach to criminal justice, your statement will be most helpful to the Board when you truthfully reflect on and express your unique personal experience. Please understand that your statement will be considered by the Board for the purpose of *informing parole conditions*, and not for determining whether or not to grant parole.

You may submit your Victim Impact and Reentry Statement as a written document, or as an audio or video file. Your statement may include some or all of the following:

Impact

1. Please describe *the harm you experienced*, and its effect on you and/or your family.
2. What, if any, was the *emotional impact* of this crime on you and/or your family?
3. What, if any, was the *physical impact* of this crime on you and/or your family? (Note: this primarily pertains to personal/violent crimes.)
4. What, if any, was the *financial impact* of this crime on you and/or your family? (Note: please be as specific as possible regarding financial losses and other financial/legal obligations, such as medical/funeral costs, child support, etc. While restitution cannot be guaranteed, this information is helpful in providing a pathway forward.)
5. What, if any, was the *spiritual impact* of this crime on you and/or your family?
6. What, if anything, has *changed* in your life as a direct result of this crime?
7. What, if anything, do you *wish for now* for yourself and/or your family?

Reentry

8. Would you like to request any *special conditions* of parole supervision that would alter the offender's proximity or contact with you and/or your family? If yes, please describe.
9. If community service is recommended as part of the offender's return to the community, do you have a *favorite charity or non-profit organization* you'd like to recommend as placement?
10. Is there *any other information* you would like to share, or requests you have?

How to Submit Your Victim Impact and Reentry Statement

If you choose to submit a Victim Impact and Reentry Statement, please submit the cover sheet along with the statement (written, audio, or video) in one of the following ways:

U.S. mail: Board of Pardons & Committee on Parole
Victim Services
P.O. Box 94304
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Email: victimservices@la.gov

Online form: <https://www.doc.la.gov/victim-services/>

Mark CONFIDENTIAL if you do not want the statement/s shared with the offender and his/her attorney. Confidential statements will be shared only with the Board members but cannot be read into the official record during the parole hearing.

Double Check!

1. Please make sure you **include the offender's name, DOC#, and the date of the hearing**. It is equally important that you include **your contact information**.
2. It is essential that the statement is received **at least 14 days in advance** of the scheduled parole hearing.

Further resources that may be helpful:

<https://doc.la.gov/louisiana-board-of-pardons-and-parole>

<https://doc.la.gov/victim-services/>

<https://www.LAVO.info/>

For guidance or support in submitting a Victim Impact and Reentry statement, please contact Victim Services.

XVI. WHAT ARE PAROLE CONDITIONS, AND HOW ARE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS INVOLVED?

All parolees (formerly incarcerated people now on parole) are required to follow parole conditions. Parole conditions are the rules and requirements assigned to parolees. At a minimum, all parolees must follow these **standard parole conditions**:

- report to a parole officer according to an assigned schedule
- live in an approved neighborhood and move only with permission
- notify a parole officer of changes to employment
- not own a gun
- not break the law

If parole is granted through a hearing conducted by the Board of Pardons and Parole, the Board can assign additional requirements or **special conditions** that the parolee must follow. Often these conditions are personalized to reflect the wishes of the victim/survivor or of law enforcement.

Victims and survivors sometimes express being upset, angry or confused that the incarcerated person might receive early release through parole. While this is understandable, it's important to note that participating in the parole process is the *only* way you can request individualized parole conditions. The Board takes the requests of victims and survivors very seriously. **Setting personalized conditions can increase your peace of mind.**

Special conditions might include requirements that the parolee refrains from contact with you and your family; does not live in a particular neighborhood; volunteers for a specific community organization; attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings; has supervised visitation with children; has extended curfew; or pays restitution.

Parole conditions are very strict. If the parolee violates any of the conditions of their parole, they could be sent back to prison for the remainder of their sentence.

XVII. WHAT IS AN ACCOUNTABILITY LETTER?

Offenders may not initiate contact with victims and survivors for any reason, even to apologize.

Many victims and survivors wonder why they never received an apology, and believe this means their offenders have no remorse for the harm they caused. In truth, many offenders have a sincere wish to apologize. However, by law neither they nor their family members are allowed to initiate contact with you for any reason, even to take responsibility for their actions and express remorse. This can be especially confusing and troubling if the crime was committed against a family member.

An accountability letter is a letter written by an offender stating responsibility and remorse for the crime. To submit an accountability letter, the offender must have participated in a victim awareness training. Program space is limited, and trainings are not offered at every correctional facility. Therefore, registering to receive an accountability letter does not guarantee that the offender in your case has had the opportunity to write one.

Victims and survivors who register and receive an accountability letter may wonder why the offender doesn't ask for forgiveness. Offenders are instructed not to ask for forgiveness because the trainings teach that forgiveness should never be requested, only offered. While this might not fit with everyone's belief system, it is the standard for communication.

Not every offender is skilled in writing or is comfortable expressing themselves through words. Accountability letters may not be polished, or state things in ways victims and survivors expect. Therefore, it's important to try not to have expectations about what "should" be in the letter.

Because there are few options to communicate with offenders, victims and survivors who attend parole hearings might also be surprised to discover how much offenders have changed over the years, and how much remorse they have for their previous actions. During parole hearings, offenders speak last. This means you will not hear how offenders take responsibility for their actions until after you have already given your Victim Impact and Reentry Statement and everyone else has spoken.

You may want to learn before the parole hearing whether the offender has remorse for their actions, and this information might influence whether you oppose or support parole. Victims and survivors who wish to learn more about – or communicate with -- offenders before parole hearings can do this in three ways:

1. Participate in the Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD) process. It's important to start this process approximately a year before the parole hearing.
2. Register to receive an Accountability Letter.
3. Contact Victim Services to discuss receiving current information about an offender, or to begin a process of communication. Victim Services can help determine the best and timeliest approach for you.

To discuss any of these options further, please contact Victim Services.

XVIII. WHAT IS VICTIM-OFFENDER DIALOGUE?

Victims and survivors often have questions only their offenders can answer, and wish to talk directly with the person responsible for their harm. Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD) provides the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting between the victim/survivor of a crime and the person who committed the crime. It is a cautious process facilitated by a trained professional.

Victim-Offender Dialogue is:

- Victim requested. Only victims and survivors may initiate the process.
- Victim driven. Victims and survivors decide the pace of the process, and what is or isn't addressed.
- Victim sensitive. The rights and needs of the victims and survivors are considered at every step of the process.
- Empowering. Victims and survivors may feel stronger and more confident in their lives as a result of this process.

Additional considerations:

- The victim or survivor must be at least 18 years-old
- Requests involving offenders on probation or under parole supervision are not currently being accepted.
- VOD preparation is not allowed to overlap appeals, civil suits, or parole or pardon processes. This means the VOD process must be completed before the parole hearing.
- An offender may choose to participate or not to participate, and will be neither be rewarded nor punished for the decision.
- The process can be stopped temporarily or permanently at any point by the facilitators, the victim, or the offender. Participation in preparation does not guarantee that a dialogue will take place. The preparation process takes as long as it takes (can be a year or more) and leads to a single meeting.
- The VOD process may not be used by an offender in an attempt to obtain an early release from prison.

If you would like to learn more about participating in a VOD process, contact Victim Services.

XIX. WHAT REHABILITATIVE PROGRAMMING IS OFFERED IN LOUISIANA PRISONS?

Rehabilitation is a primary purpose of incarceration. It is well known that hurt people hurt people. For example, men are far more likely to act violently if they witnessed or experienced violence as a child, either at home or through oppressive systems. Therefore, one of the most effective ways to improve public safety is to address the underlying “hurts” that lead to crime. Victims and survivors often wonder what type of rehabilitative programs are offered in prisons, and how offenders develop the skills to live productive, healthy lives in mainstream society.

The Department of Corrections is committed to offering a wide array of programs to help incarcerated individuals change their mindset and behavior. Every prison facility is different, and some offer more programming than others, but all rehabilitative programs are designed to help inmates lead healthier lives both in and out of prison. Programs include basic education, vocational and occupational programming, faith-based opportunities, substance abuse programs, mental health treatment, and values development. Most courses offer certificates of completion, and some can earn inmates “Good Time” credit toward early release.

At the pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole hearing, the incarcerated individual will be asked about the programs they completed. Some people have a long list of programs, and others may have very few. There are many reasons for this: there is often a long wait-list to enroll in classes; offenders with life sentences have fewer options for classes; some programs aren’t offered on a regular basis; and all programs aren’t offered in every prison facility. The Board may set as a special condition that the inmate complete a specific course before they earn parole, or that they continue rehabilitative programming post-release.

The following is a brief description of the programs. Please note: many of the programs are designed and taught by incarcerated individuals who serve as mentors for other inmates.

Education

General Education Development (GED) or High School Equivalency Preparation (HSE-Prep)
Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Developmental Studies

Literacy

Special Education

Associate Degree Opportunities

Higher Education offered by New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Job Skills Training

Some of these programs are offered at various institutions: Automotive Technology, Building Technology, Carpentry, Collision Repair, Computer Specialist, Applications/Operations, Culinary Arts, Electrician/Electromechanical Technology, General Construction, Heating/Air-Conditioning/Refrigeration, Horticulture, Masonry, Outdoor Power Equipment Technology, Office Systems Technology, Offset Printing Operations, Plumbing, Upholstery, Welding

Substance Abuse

Various substance abuse education and treatment options are available to address diverse needs.

Values Development

Faith-based and character-based programs assist incarcerated individuals to develop a values base that is consistent with what is expected in our society. Programs include Thinking for a Change, and Living in Balance.

Therapeutic Programs

Anger and Stress Management
Communicable Disease Education
Grief Counseling
Life Skills
Parenting Skills

Sex Offender Treatment

Treatment is multi-phased and tailored to each individual, based on their criminogenic (cause of criminal behavior) need. These programs provide them the opportunity to learn, develop, and use risk management skills that could help them live a lifestyle devoid of hurting others.

Specialized Programming

Communication Dynamics
Commitment for Change: Overcoming Errors in Thinking
Personal Awareness and Reflection Development (PARD)
Self-Esteem
Self-Help
Sexual Trauma Resolution Group
Victim Awareness

Youthful Offender Program (YOP)

In certain cases, Louisiana law allows for juveniles under the age of 18 to be prosecuted as adults and, if convicted, housed within the adult corrections system. Youthful offenders often have different needs than the adult population. The YOP addresses these concerns. Youthful prisoners are housed separately from the adult population until they reach 18 years of age. While enrolled, youthful prisoners study to obtain their high school equivalency, are involved in self-help programs, and are assigned a job within the prison. This program provides positive experiences that foster a solid foundation and instill spiritual and moral values that change criminal thinking.

100 Hours Pre-Release and Reentry Transition

This curriculum prepares incarcerated individuals for their successful return to society by providing necessary skills, teaching how to cope with daily stressors, developing communication skills, and attempting to minimize risks of recidivism (committing another crime), such as homelessness, unemployment, etc.

Prisoner Clubs and Organizations

In addition to the Department of Corrections-offered programs, incarcerated individuals have their own clubs and organizations. These are different at each prison facility and cover numerous areas of life.

XX. WHO CONTACTS VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS ABOUT AN UPCOMING PAROLE HEARING?

The Board of Pardons and Parole will notify you by mail when the offender in your case has become *eligible for a parole hearing*. You will be notified again *when a parole hearing date has been set*. **It is very important that you register for notifications, and that you keep your contact information up-to-date. (See Section VIII)**

However, **the first contact you receive will most likely be from a Parole or Community Supervision officer in the Division of Probation and Parole**. This person will be conducting a Pre-Parole Investigation.

In order for an incarcerated person to become eligible for a parole hearing, they must meet different criteria. First, they must have already served enough time in prison, according to the sentencing formula relevant to them. If they meet that criterion, then the Division of Probation and Parole begins a thorough Pre-Parole Investigation of the offender's record and assembles a file that will be reviewed by the Committee on Parole. Part of this investigation involves contacting victims and survivors for interviews about the crime and its impact.

In addition, this investigation includes detailed reports from the Department of Public Safety & Corrections, Board staff, and, if a case warrants, from professional staff such as physicians or psychologists. Sources of information include arrest and court records, pre-sentence investigations, and existing psychological evaluations and reports from any treatment programs an offender may have attended. Other prison records that include work and conduct records, educational and rehabilitative efforts are also included. Community response to an offender's early release is also considered. This response includes, but is not limited to the sentencing judge, other judicial and law enforcement officials, as well as victims and survivors of the crime. Please note, by law the information in this investigative report is confidential and not considered public record.

It can be unsettling to receive an unexpected phone call or a knock on the door from a uniformed parole officer who is contacting you for an interview. You might not be ready at that exact moment to discuss the crime you experienced. **It is your right to schedule a time for the interview that meets your needs**. It is recommended that you choose a time when you will not be interrupted, and a place that's private enough for you to speak freely. You can talk by phone or set up an in-person meeting.

If you would like to be proactive in learning information about an inmate, you can call a 24-hour offender locator service that is available through the Louisiana Automated Victim Notification System (LAVNS) at (866) 528-6748 toll free, or visit the online resource at www.vineline.com. **For information about an offender's possible release date, you may also call (225) 383-4580.**

If you have questions or would like support through any of this process, please contact Victim Services.

XXI. ATTENDING A PARDON, COMMUTATION OF SENTENCE, OR PAROLE HEARING

WHO MAY ATTEND A HEARING?

Because Louisiana has an “Open Meetings Law,” hearings are open to the general public. Hearings are usually attended only by people involved in the individual case, including:

- **Board panel members:** Each panel has three or five members (depending on the type of hearing), all of whom are appointed by the Governor.
- **Staff of the Board of Pardons and Parole:** Staff are there to record and facilitate the parole hearing and are able to answer any questions you may have.
- **Victim Advocate:** Victims and survivors will always be supported by a victim advocate from LAVO or CVSB. In some cases, there is also a victim advocate present from the District Attorney’s office.
- **Victim or Survivor and Family Members:** It is not required that victims and survivors attend the hearing, but they are welcome to do so. This is especially helpful to the Board in determining special conditions for parole that will alleviate concerns the victim or survivor may have (**See Section XVI**). In a cases where there is more than one victim or survivor, there may be multiple victim groups attending.
- **Offender and Family Members:** The offender will not be physically present in the hearing room, but the offender's image will appear on a television screen. The offender will be physically located at a correctional facility. The offender’s family members and supporters may be present in the hearing room or at the correctional facility.
- **Offender's Attorney:** If the offender has an attorney, the attorney will be located at the same location as the offender and will also appear on the television screen.
- **Legal and Law Enforcement Professionals:** A representative from the District Attorney's office that prosecuted the offender may attend the hearing, but it is not required. Other legal professionals in support or opposition of parole may attend and request to speak.
- **Community Members:** In rare occasions, people not connected to the case observe a parole hearing for educational purposes.
- **News/Media:** Members of the press may attend a hearing in accordance with the open meetings law. However, no recording or audio equipment is allowed in the hearing room. You will be informed if press will be present.

Please note: On some occasions, due to space limitations or safety concerns, attendees may be asked to wait outside the Hearing Room.

ARE VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS REQUIRED TO ATTEND A HEARING?

No. The choice is yours. Some victims and survivors want to attend their offender's hearing, and actively participate in the parole process. Some victims and survivors choose not to attend the hearing but participate by submitting a written Victim Impact Statement or by having a representative speak on their behalf. Other victims and survivors prefer not to attend or become involved. Every victim or survivor is unique with their own individual circumstances. No one should pressure you to do something that doesn't fit your beliefs, reasons, and motivations.

If you would like to attend, please contact Victim Services.

If you are unable or choose not to attend a hearing in person, but would still like your statement presented to the Committee on Parole, you have several options:

- Submit a written, audio, or video Victim Impact and Reentry Statement. This should be submitted at least two weeks before the hearing date. (**See Section XV**)
- Participate by telephone from your local District Attorney's office. Please contact your local District Attorney's Victims Services Coordinator for more information, or contact Victim Services for help coordinating this option.
- Choose a representative to speak on your behalf. You may also have an attorney or designate someone in writing as a representative to appear and speak on your behalf. The District Attorney's office that prosecuted the case can also speak for you. Call the District Attorney's office for assistance.

If you prefer not to attend or submit a statement, you can either simply do nothing, or you can advise Victim Services of your choice.

MAY CHILDREN ATTEND A HEARING?

Children under the age of 12 years are not allowed to attend a hearing of the Board of Pardons and Parole, except when the child is a victim and chooses to appear.

Pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole proceedings can be very confusing and emotional for children. If you have a child of any age who is involved either by attending at hearing, or simply being aware of the events, it is a good idea to offer them the support of a trained professional.

For help supporting your child, please reach out to Victim Services.

DO VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS HAVE TO REGISTER TO ATTEND A HEARING?

Yes. It is important to contact Victim Services to schedule your appearance **at least two weeks before the hearing date**. Victim Services will alert the Board of Pardons and Parole staff that you plan to attend, and will have your name ready for check-in at the security office at the main entrance.

Planning in advance also offers you time to speak with a victim advocate, who can be very helpful in explaining your rights as a victim/survivor, as well as what to expect at the hearing itself. The victim advocate can also arrange to meet you when you arrive on the day of the hearing, answer your questions, and guide you through the various steps.

To schedule your attendance at the hearing at least two weeks before the hearing date, contact Victim Services.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN A HEARING VIA ZOOM

In accordance with Executive Proclamations JBE 20-30 and JBE 20-33, issued on March 16, 2020 and March 22, 2020, respectively, pardon and parole hearings will be conducted utilizing video conferencing technology during the pendency of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The hearings will be conducted using ZOOM Video Conferencing that will allow for observation and comment by members of the public. Please check the Parole Schedules & Dockets for more information.

You may choose to participate in the hearing process through ZOOM Video Conferencing on a PC, Mac, Linux, iOS or Android device or by TELEPHONE. Please find directions on how to participate using ZOOM attached below and to the HEARING DOCKET. The Board will allow up to 3 participants to speak in support and opposition of each case. If you do not plan on speaking, and wish only to observe, you can watch the hearing live at the link below.

If you choose not to participate using ZOOM, the Board will accept a detailed letter stating your position regarding the applicant's request for parole. Letters can be mailed or emailed. *We ask that you send letters at least 1 week in advance of the scheduled hearing date in order that the board or panel has sufficient time to review your position statement.*

MAILING address:

LA Committee on Parole
P.O. Box 94304-Capital Station
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9304

EMAIL Address:

PBHQParoleBoardHQ@LA.GOV

In order to participate through ZOOM, you will need the following information:

- Download ZOOM from [ZOOM.us](https://zoom.us) or through your cellular device's application store.
- The ZOOM Parole Board waiting room will open at 8:00 AM. Please connect to the meeting 15 minutes in advance of the scheduled start time to ensure entry to the meeting. You will be placed in a 'virtual waiting room'. During this time, you will be provided instructions on how to participate in the hearing and offer your comments.
- You will need the **MEETING ID #** for an offender's case in order to participate by VIDEO.
- If participating by PHONE, you will need to call either one of these PHONE numbers: **1(669)-900-6833** or **1(646)-876-9923**.
 - Enter the **MEETING ID #** for that case when prompted to do so.
 - You will be prompted to press the '#' button to enter the virtual waiting room.

You may also watch hearings live via YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoYjTgNSdFFqnSnuu1Wi3fg/live>

Parole Board Dockets can be found here: <https://doc.louisiana.gov/imprisoned-person-programs-resources/pardons-parole/parole-schedules-dockets/>

The Parole Board Dockets web pages are updated at noon everyday Monday through Friday and are subject to change.

WHAT IDENTIFICATION IS REQUIRED TO ATTEND A HEARING?

Everyone who wishes to attend a hearing must bring valid government-issued picture identification. Examples of acceptable **government-issued picture identification** include the following:

- State driver's license with picture
- LA Office of Motor Vehicles identification card with picture
- Armed Forces identification card with picture
- Identification card issued by the United States Department of Justice Immigration and Naturalization Services with picture
- Current Passport with picture

WHAT IS THE DRESS CODE?

It is recommended that you dress conservatively. This is a legal proceeding, and the Board appreciates you dressing in a way that acknowledges the seriousness of the occasion.

Please **do not** wear sheer or transparent clothes, strapless or "spaghetti" strap tops, "muscle shirts," shorts, short skirts or dresses, clothes that expose the midriff area, clothes displaying obscene or offensive language or graphics, flip-flops, hats or caps, or sunglasses. You may be denied access to the hearing room if you are dressed in inappropriate attire.

WHO ASSISTS VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS?

Victims and survivors do not have to go through this process alone. There is always a victim advocate available.

You have the right to be informed and supported. You have the right to ask questions before, during, and after the parole hearing. You have the right to express your feelings and needs. (See **Section V**). The advocate's role is to make sure you understand the pardon or parole process, get your questions answered, know your rights, and ensure that your rights are met. Please note: the advocate is not permitted to speak on your behalf during the hearing, or recommend a particular outcome.

It is very important to register to attend a hearing. Please contact Victim Services.

WHEN IS THE HEARING DECISION ANNOUNCED?

The hearing decision is announced at the end of the hearing.

After everyone has spoken during the hearing, the Board members will state their vote on whether to grant or deny pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole, along with their reasons for their vote. In some instances, a unanimous vote is required. In other instances, a majority vote is sufficient. Once the votes have been stated publically, the Panel Chairperson will announce the panel's final decision.

Results include whether the incarcerated individual will be granted pardon or parole, along with any special conditions that might be placed on their parole. (See **Section XVI**). All decisions are final.

ARE AUDIO RECORDINGS OF THE HEARING AVAILABLE?

Yes. Upon request, a digital or cd audio file of the hearing will be available approximately 30 days after the parole hearing date. The fee is \$20 for a digital file or \$25 for a CD. Written transcripts are not available. **Please contact Victim Services for more information.**

WHAT IS A CANCELLATION OR CONTINUANCE?

The *cancellation* of a hearing may occur if the Board is unavailable; in the case of an illness of a panel member, offender, or offender's attorney; or due to a weather event such as a hurricane or other natural disaster.

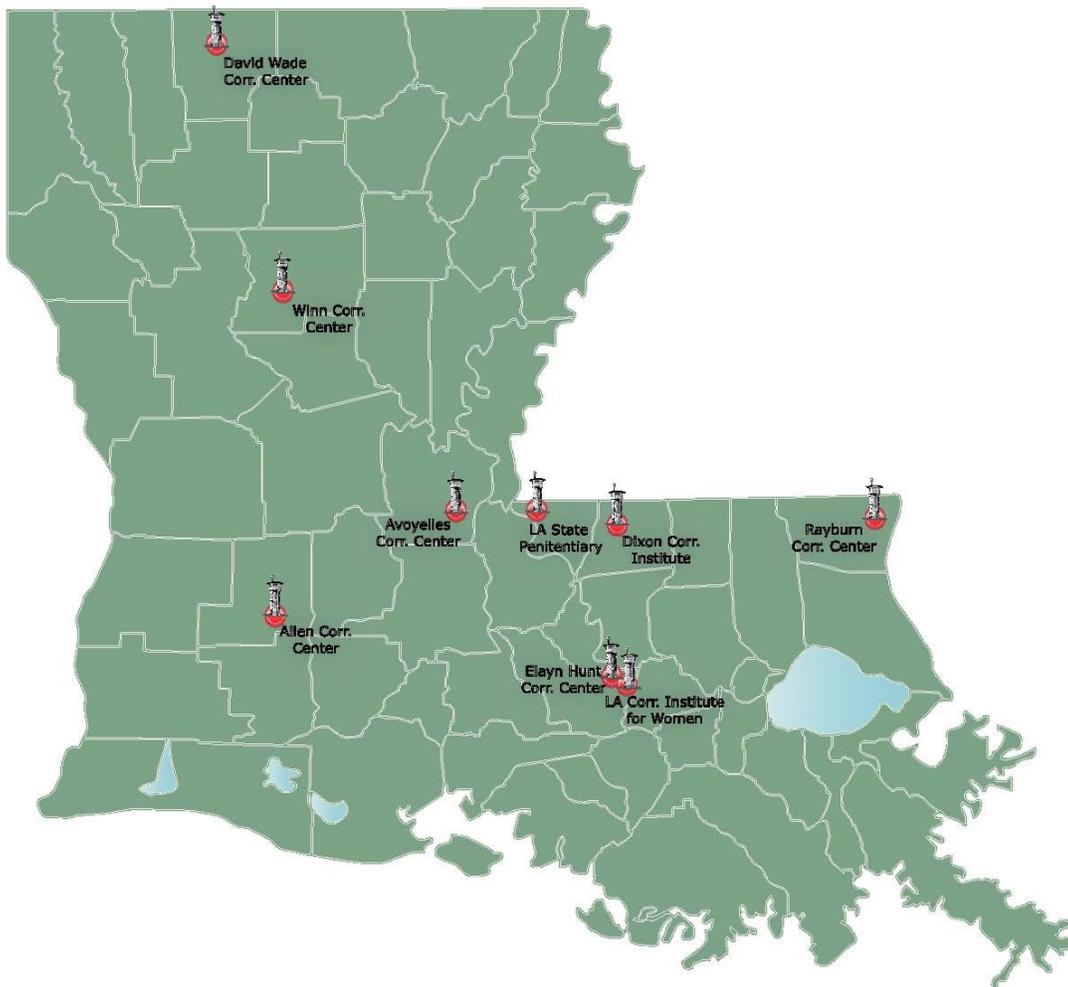
The *continuance* (postponement) of a particular case may occur at the request of an offender or an offender's attorney in order to prepare for the hearing. A hearing may also be continued if the pre-parole investigation report is not complete by the hearing date.

Hearings that are cancelled or continued will be re-scheduled, and you will be notified of the new hearing date.

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THE HEARING?

When the hearing is over, victims and survivors will be escorted out of the Hearing Room before anyone else. You may go directly into the Victim Waiting Area, or you may leave the building to return home. The Victim Advocate will remain on hand to support you, and will be available for follow-up services in the days, weeks, and months after the hearing. Please know that you do not have to navigate this process alone.

XXII. LOUISIANA STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS



Visit the DOC website for facility contact information at www.doc.la.gov

XXIII. FREQUENTLY USED TERMS

The terms listed below are often used during the pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole hearing process. Please do not hesitate to ask victims' advocates, correctional officers, or Board staff if you have any questions.

Accountability Letter: A letter written by an offender stating responsibility and remorse for the crime they committed. To submit an accountability letter, the offender must have participated in a victim awareness training.

Board: A term used for the members of the Board of Pardons and Parole. All members are appointed by the Governor. There are five members of the Board of Pardons, and they are the only individuals who can make pardon and commutation of sentence decisions. The Committee on Parole includes the five Pardon Board members plus two at-large members, all of whom can make parole decisions.

Clemency: A general term for legal decisions that reduce a sentence, or in some cases overturn a conviction. Both a pardon and a commutation of sentence are examples of clemency.

Commutation of sentence: The legal adjustment of a sentence. Commutations reduce or modify a sentence to a lesser sentence.

Compassionate Release: A type of medical release typically granted to incarcerated people who are in need of hospice care and have a short life expectancy.

Crime Victims Services Bureau (CVSB): A division within the Department of Corrections that offers crime victims and survivors easy access to information and registration.

Executive Session: A private, closed-door session during a pardon, commutation of sentence, or parole hearing when the panel members discuss confidential matters related to a case.

Full Term Release: The incarcerated person is released from prison after serving the full term of their sentence.

Good Time (Diminution of Sentence): A term of early release from prison to parole supervision. Good Time credit is earned by an incarcerated person while in prison, which reduces the amount of time they remain incarcerated. Good-time credit is earned by exemplary behavior and the completion of drug, work, or educational programming.

Live Hearing: A hearing held by the Board of Pardons and Parole at a prison facility or other state institution (such as university, state office, etc.).

Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole: A government agency established to make fair and objective pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole decisions. The Board of Pardons and Parole is comprised of the Board of Pardons and the Committee on Parole.

Louisiana Department of Public Safety & Corrections (DOC): A state agency responsible for supervising adult offenders sentenced to state prison, and supervising formerly incarcerated individuals if they are released on parole. The Secretary of the Department is appointed by the Governor and serves as a member of the Governor's Cabinet.

Louisiana Victim Outreach Program (LAVO): A program that provides victims and survivors of violent offenses with educational and healing resources designed to help navigate the pardons and parole processes.

Medical Parole: A program that provides parole to qualified incarcerated individuals if they're sick or disabled. This program is not available to individuals convicted of murder.

Medical Treatment Furlough: The transfer to an assigned medical facility for an incarcerated individual with a terminal medical condition or permanent disability, who is not expected to recover from their illness, and who is not considered a threat to public safety. They remain supervised by a parole officer.

Notification of Hearing: A letter that indicates the date, time, and place of the parole hearing. This letter is sent to victims who are registered with the Crime Victim Services Bureau at least 60 days before the hearing, as required by law.

Panel Chairperson: A member of the Board of Pardons and Parole who facilitates the steps of a hearing and announces the decision of the panel after all panel members have voted.

Pardon: The “forgiving” of a conviction in legal terms. While the conviction remains on the person’s record, a pardon relieves the person from the restrictions and limitations of other formerly incarcerated people.

Parole: The release of an incarcerated individual from prison before the full term of their sentence is complete.

Parole Conditions: The rules and requirements assigned to offenders when they are released from prison on parole. At a minimum, all parolees must follow **standard parole conditions**. If parole is granted through a hearing conducted by the Board of Pardons and Parole, the Board can assign additional requirements or **special conditions** that the parolee must follow. Often these conditions are personalized to reflect the wishes of the victim/survivor or of law enforcement.

Parole Eligibility: The right of an offender to be considered for parole. Eligibility does not guarantee parole. Parole is granted through a parole hearing at the discretion of the Committee on Parole.

Parole Eligibility Date (PED): The earliest date an offender may be legally released on parole.

Parole Hearing: A hearing to consider an offender's suitability for parole. The hearing may be scheduled up to 6 months before the offender's Parole Eligibility Date (PED).

Parole Hearing Conference Room: The room where pardon, commutation of sentence, and parole hearings are held.

Parole Revocation: The removal of parole benefits.

Probation: A period of community supervision that is ordered by the court instead of sentencing a person to prison.

Reentry: A broad term that describes the process of a formerly incarcerated person transitioning back to the larger community.

Rehabilitative Programming: Structured restorative learning opportunities for incarcerated individuals, which may include basic education, vocational and occupational programming, faith-based opportunities, substance abuse programs, mental health treatment, and values development.

Remote Hearing: A hearing held by the Board of Pardons and Parole that takes place at the Department of Corrections Headquarters in Baton Rouge in the Parole Hearing Conference Room, while the offender is televised into the room from the remote location of the prison facility.

Transitional Work Program: A program in which an incarcerated person is housed for the remainder of their sentence in a structured setting designed to help them reenter the work force.

Trauma: An emotional response to a deeply distressing event. Trauma can affect a person physically, psychologically, emotionally, spiritually, and socially.

Victim Impact and Reentry Statement: A written or oral statement that describes the emotional, physical, financial, and/or spiritual impact the crime had on the victim, the victim's family, and/or the community.

Victim-Offender Dialogue (VOD): A mediated face-to-face meeting between the victim or survivor of a crime and the person who committed the crime. It is a cautious process facilitated by a trained professional.

VINE (Victim Information and Notification Everyday) Network: A national network that provides custody status and criminal case information.

LA Board of Pardons and Parole
P. O. Box 94304
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9304
225.342.5421(Pardons)
225.342.6622 (Paroles)
<http://doc.la.gov/quicklinks/pardon-board/>
<http://doc.la.gov/quicklinks/parole-board/>

Crime Victims Services Bureau (CVSB)
P. O. Box 94304
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9304
225.342.1056
<https://doc.louisiana.gov/public-programs-resources/victim-services/>

Louisiana Victim Outreach Program (LAVO)
P. O. Box 94304
Baton Rouge, LA 70804-9304
225.342.1570
<https://www.lavo.info>

Or Call Toll Free: 1-877-342-6110

