



ACLU
Alaska

PAROLE & SB 176
partner toolkit

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DEAR PARTNER,

Thank you for helping raise support for SB 176 to reform the Alaska Board of Parole. Changes to Alaska's criminal legal system are long overdue; passing SB 176 can help give incarcerated people a fair shot at rehabilitation through parole. In this toolkit, you'll find

- Talking points and quick facts
- Sample organizational and sign-on letters
- Sample handwritten letters from incarcerated Alaskans
- Sample verbal testimony
- Sample email action alert
- Sample social media and graphics
- Links to more resources and contact information

If you have further questions or need more resources, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at any point.

In solidarity,



Michael Garvey
Advocacy Director, ACLU of Alaska



Megan Edge
Prison Project Director, ACLU of Alaska

SB 176: REFORM THE ALASKA BOARD OF PAROLE

- **SB 176 would reform the composition of the Board of Parole** to include a licensed mental health expert, a crime victim, a substance misuse expert, someone who has been on parole or has a felony conviction, and an individual from a federally recognized tribe.
- Currently, the Board of Parole is composed mostly of people with Department of Corrections backgrounds.
- Currently, there is no oversight or reporting process for denials of parole by the Board of Parole.

KEY TAKEAWAYS AND TALKING POINTS

- **Parole is a critical component of the criminal legal system** in Alaska; we must ensure that the Board of Parole operates fairly and gives all incarcerated people the opportunity to achieve parole.
- **Recent trends have demonstrated that many parole applicants are not getting a fair shake.** People who have demonstrated that they can return safely to their communities are being denied arbitrarily and without explanation.
- **Alaska's criminal justice system is based on the premise of rehabilitation alongside punishment.** When a person serves their time, takes responsibility for their offense, and puts together a plan to return to their community, they deserve a meaningful opportunity to do so.
- **Parole increases institutional safety.** When the board consistently denies parole to people who have good institutional records and completed extensive rehabilitative programming, it diminishes hope and an important incentive for good behavior. Institutions are safer for incarcerated Alaskans and for Department of Corrections staff when parole is an achievable goal, and when people who are eligible know that taking positive steps in rehabilitation will realistically improve their chances of being granted release.

ABOUT THE ALASKA BOARD AND PAROLE

- **In Alaska, a five-person board makes decisions about parole** — including granting or denying applications for parole and setting conditions for release.
- **There are four types of parole** — the most common are mandatory parole, when a person has served their sentence, and discretionary parole, when a person applies to be considered for early release based on a good institutional record and a comprehensive release plan.
- **Most current members of the Alaska Board of Parole have a law enforcement background within the Department of Corrections**, and none have a primary professional background in behavioral or mental health, human development, or similar fields. State law requires only one person to have experience in the field of criminal justice.

GENERAL TRENDS DEMONSTRATING THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN ALASKA

- **Since 2020, the Alaska Board of Parole has released 79% fewer people and is holding 75% fewer hearings** than before the pandemic. Source: Dept. of Corrections, 2022.
- **Only about 33% of incarcerated Alaskans who applied for discretionary parole had their applications granted in 2023**, down from a high of 66% in 2015. Source: Dept. of Corrections, 2023.
- **The Board's decisions should be transparent.** It does not publish any information on its rationale for granting or denying parole applications. While each applicant must be considered on their own, the Board is inconsistent in its rulings, and we have observed different outcomes for similarly situated applicants.



NATIONAL COMPARISONS



Oklahoma. At least two members of the Pardon and Parole Board are required to have five years of training or experience in mental health services, substance abuse services, or social work.



Wyoming. In addition to 17 other states, Wyoming does not require subjective decision-making. These parole boards are only analyzing parole eligibility on whether there is a reasonable probability that the inmate is able and willing to fulfill obligations as a law-abiding citizen.



Texas. Parole boards in Texas and 12 other states file an annual report to an oversight committee that includes deviations from guidelines and explanations about parole applications that it denies. This report is made public.

SAMPLE MASS/ ORGANIZATIONAL LETTER TO ELECTED OFFICIALS

Subject: Support SB 176 on parole reform

Dear [elected official],

As an Alaskan who cares deeply about community safety, I respectfully ask that you support SB 176. This bill is needed to ensure that incarcerated people are fairly considered when they come before the parole board.

Since 2020, the Parole Board in Alaska has released 79% fewer people and is holding 75% fewer hearings than before the pandemic. The high rate of denials includes people who have completed rehabilitative programs and developed comprehensive release plans including behavioral health support for substance use and mental health, housing, employment, and positive support networks. It includes people who have support from their institutional parole officers, who have the best understanding of the individuals on their caseloads. All of this demonstrates that these individuals can safely return to our cities, towns, and villages and positively contribute to our communities and their families.

When the board consistently denies parole to people who have good institutional records and have completed extensive rehabilitative programming, it diminishes hope and an important incentive for good behavior. Institutions are safer for incarcerated Alaskans and for Department of Corrections staff when parole is an achievable goal and when people who are eligible know that taking positive steps in rehabilitation will realistically improve their chances of being granted release. Denying people parole at these high rates does not improve public safety because it means deserving people are not able to return to their families to provide financial and emotional support to their loved ones, communities, and the workforce. It also means that taxpayers carry the ongoing cost of incarcerating individuals instead of funding things that make us safer and prevent harm, like education and healthcare.

I strongly support SB 176 because it would require the Board of Parole to have a more diverse set of members who can more fairly assess an incarcerated person's ability to be successful, safe, and productive members of our communities after incarceration. Together, people with law enforcement backgrounds, expertise in mental health, substance use and recovery, someone who has been a victim of a crime, a formerly incarcerated person, and a tribal member will more objectively determine the freedom status of Alaskans, who, despite their felony convictions, still maintain their right to rehabilitation.

Please join SB 176 as a cosponsor. Parole is a critical component of the criminal legal system in Alaska; we must ensure that the Board operates fairly and gives all incarcerated people the opportunity to achieve parole, reduce cycles of poverty and incarceration in families, and contribute to our communities.

Sincerely,
[signer]

SAMPLE (HANDWRITTEN) LETTER TO ELECTED OFFICIALS + GUIDE FOR WRITING FROM INCARCERATED OR PAROLED ALASKANS

1. Insert your elected official's title and last name

2. Insert your first and last name and where you are from

3. Clearly state that you support SB 176

4. Write 2-3 sentences about your experience with the Alaska Board of Parole

5. Write 2 sentences about how you think the bill would make a difference.

6. Restate your ask! Ask your elected official to support SB 176.

7. Add a thank you and sign your name

Dear Representative Shower,

My name is John Smith, and I'm a constituent from Wasilla. I'm writing to you to express my support for SB 176, to reform the Alaska Board of Parole.

I have been incarcerated at Wildwood Correctional Center for the last 15 years. During my time, I have completed every rehabilitative program available to me, have held consistent employment, and have only had two behavioral infractions while incarcerated. I have served 1/3 of my sentence and have applied for parole, with strong support for conditional release from my parole officer. Despite meeting the basic requirements for parole, I have been denied with little explanation from the Board of Parole.

I believe the Board of Parole should be reformed to provide a well-rounded set of backgrounds to judge if incarcerated people like myself are fit to live without posing a threat to the community. The Board of Parole should operate with the same level of transparency and accountability as other boards and commissions in Alaska.

Please support SB 176 to make Alaska's criminal legal system more fair and just.

Sincerely,

John Smith

ORAL TESTIMONY FOR HEARINGS

- **Plan for 1-3 minutes of testimony (depending on hearing)**
- **Introduce yourself and state your connection to the criminal legal system or parole**
- **Thank the committee for hearing public testimony**

SAMPLE SCRIPT

“ My name is John Smith, and I’m from Wasilla. I’d like to thank the committee for allowing public testimony today on this very important issue. I’m here to express my support for SB 176, to reform the Alaska Board of Parole.

Since 2020, the Parole Board in Alaska has released 79% fewer people and is holding 75% fewer hearings than before the pandemic. The high rate of denials has not improved public safety and has contributed to overcrowding in DOC facilities, which diverts resources away from things that make us safe, like healthcare and education.

Currently, the Alaska Board of Parole is made up of mostly former Department of Corrections staff. People in this role have a critical job in assessing if an incarcerated individual can safely return to our cities, towns, and villages and positively contribute to our communities and their families. I believe the Board of Parole should be reformed to provide a well-rounded set of backgrounds to judge if incarcerated people are fit to live without posing a threat to the community.

Please support and pass SB 176 to make Alaska’s criminal legal system more fair and just. Thank you again for hearing public testimony. ”

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SAMPLE ACTION ALERT TO SUPPORTERS



Dear ACLU of Alaska supporter,

Parole is an alternative to incarceration that provides community safety and accountability. Parole creates more opportunities for people serving a sentence to access rehabilitative programs, and to provide financial and emotional support to their families, which helps end cycles of harm and incarceration.

[Tell your elected officials to cosponsor SB 176 to reform parole in Alaska.](#)



Currently, parole eligibility for every incarcerated Alaskan is decided by a five-person board that is appointed by the Governor. Since 2020, the Parole Board in Alaska has released 79% fewer people and is holding 75% fewer hearings than before the pandemic. The high rate of denials has not improved public safety and has contributed to overcrowding in DOC facilities, which diverts resources away from things that make us safe, like healthcare and education.

[Tell your legislator to support reform for the Board of Parole.](#)

The Board should contain a diverse array of backgrounds and expertise that can more accurately assess someone's chance of community success should they be granted discretionary parole. Nearly all current Board members have backgrounds with the Department of Corrections, and none are experts in sentencing laws, substance use and recovery, mental health, incarceration, education, or reentry.

[We ask that legislators support legislation that would reform the makeup of the Board](#) and therefore consider rehabilitation, a promise enshrined into Alaska's constitution, in their decisions about which incarcerated Alaskans can achieve parole and safely return to our communities

Thank you for speaking up for a fair and just criminal legal system.
In solidarity,

Megan Edge

P.S. Did you know that incarcerated white people were about twice as likely as Alaska Native/ American Indian and Black people to be granted discretionary parole? Read more about parole in Alaska and [take action here.](#)

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SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Graphic



Copy

Parole is a critical component of the criminal legal system in Alaska; we must ensure that the Board of Parole operates fairly and gives all incarcerated people the opportunity to achieve parole. TAKE ACTION to tell legislators to support SB 176 here-> [link action alert]

#PeopleNotPrisons

Parole is an alternative to incarceration that provides community safety and accountability. The Board of Parole needs to be reformed to give incarcerated Alaskans a fair shot at rehabilitation after serving time.

Tell your elected officials to support SB 176 to make parole more fair for Alaskans. [link]

Since 2020, the Parole Board in Alaska has released 79% fewer people and is holding 75% fewer hearings than before the pandemic.

The high rate of denials has not improved public safety and has contributed to overcrowding in DOC facilities, which diverts resources away from things that make us safe, like healthcare and education. Tell your legislator to support reform for the Board of Parole. [link]

Twitter/ X Copy

We must ensure that the Board of Parole operates fairly and gives all incarcerated people the opportunity to achieve parole. TAKE ACTION to tell legislators to support SB 176 here-> [link action alert] #PeopleNotPrisons

The Board of Parole should contain a diverse array of backgrounds and expertise that can more accurately assess someone's chance of community success if granted parole. Support reform of the parole board here: [link]

7 out of 10 Alaskans have or know someone who has interacted with the criminal legal system. The Board of Parole needs to be reformed to ensure all incarcerated Alaskans have a fair shot at achieving parole. Learn more here: [link]

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RESOURCES

GRAPHICS

CLICK TO ACCESS OR
EMAIL

MBARKER@ACLUAK.ORG
FOR ELEMENTS.

SOCIAL SHARING



@ACLUOFALASKA

'PAROLE 101' BLOGPOST ON ACLUAK.ORG

BOARD OF PAROLE STATISTICS BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

'LIKE A NURSING HOME': THE REALITIES OF ALASKA'S AGING INMATE
POPULATION ANCHORAGE DAILY NEWS, 2023

Contact: Michael Garvey, Advocacy Director – mgarvey@acluak.org
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