
Preparing For Your Return To The Community:

What Offenders and Their Families Need To Know



Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole



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Preparing for Your Release:

The Key to Starting Over

As a person who wants to leave your criminal past behind and rebuild your life, it is important that you realize that returning home to your community is a process that begins from the day you enter prison.

Begin preparing now. Put your time to good use.

It is up to **you** to follow the correctional plan that has been developed specifically to meet your needs. DOC will assign you a counselor who will monitor your progress in specific programs or treatment.

It is up to **you** to take advantage of educational and vocational programs that will help you after you are released. Talk to your counselor about a GED or college diploma, vocational training, parenting classes, basic life skills courses, and how you can get involved in other positive programs or activities within the prison.

Returning home successfully requires work, but it will be rewarding.

For you to be successful when you leave prison, it is important that you maintain connections to your family, and/or religious or community organizations that are willing to assist offenders with reentry into the community. They will help you find solutions to problems and help you to live a safe and healthy life.

This network of support may help you find a place to live and a job, two very important parts of the reentry process. Employment will enable you to support yourself and your children, if any, and keep you on the track to a new lifestyle.

When you are released, get in touch with those individuals and organizations that you kept in contact with while in prison that can support your positive reentry into society. They can help you after you return home.

To help you adjust, get involved in local organizations. Find ways to give back to your community. Avoid individuals and organizations that will encourage you to get re-involved in criminal activity.

Your parole agent can help you and your family after you are released. Parole's goal is to help you be successful. After you are released on parole, talk to your parole agent about your activities and get his or her support.

Remember - there are many agencies, programs and people waiting to help you succeed!

Highlights of the Parole Process

The parole process is best described as a series of steps for both the offender and the board.

Approximately 8 months prior to minimum date

Preparation of Case File

Required documentation is gathered and prepared for the parole interview.

Approximately 5 months prior to minimum date

Institutional Parole Agent

Inmate works with institutional parole agent to develop a reentry plan and prepare for interview.

Approximately 4 months prior to minimum date

Pre-Interview Case Review

Board members/hearing examiners review file and reentry plan.

Board Interview

Conducted either in person by a board member or hearing examiner or by a panel of two decision makers or by video conference. Sex offenses and Murder 2 & 3 require a majority vote of the board.

Approximately 3 months prior to minimum date

Post Interview

Final board decision to grant or deny parole. A grant of parole includes conditions and release of parole and starts the home plan investigation and release process.

Supervision

Offender reports to the district office or community corrections center within 24 hours of release. Conditions of parole are reviewed with the field agent.

Preparing For Your Return To The Community: What Offenders and Their Families Need To Know

Each parole district offers a family support class for offenders who are nearing release from prison. These classes help family members understand the parole process and gain an understanding of conditions of parole. The goal is to help the family understand how they can help the offender to be successful. For more information on these classes, please contact the district office where the offender will be living after being released.

An offender's successful return to the community is dependent on many factors. Planning and preparations begin while still in prison to ensure that housing, employment, benefits, treatment, programming and medical needs are met after the offender leaves prison. The efforts that an offender makes to prepare for release is viewed as the foundation for the offender to rebuild ties with the community and succeed on parole. Prior to parole consideration, an inmate must submit a home plan. This plan will be investigated to determine whether the proposed residence is appropriate for the offender while on parole.

Home Plan

Home plan investigations are conducted in accordance with the Board's dual mandate to protect the safety of the public and aid in the rehabilitation of the offender. Home plans are investigated on a case by case basis. The board investigates a home plan to consider staff and public safety as well as victim issues and any other issues that may impact the successful reentry and parole completion of the offender. These individual determinations depend upon a variety of factors. Field agents investigate each proposed home site, keeping in mind the offender's history and supervision needs, using discretion and sound judgment to determine the appropriateness of the home plan.



Ideally, an offender should submit two (2) proposed home plans in the event that one of them is not determined to be in the best interest of the offender or the public. The home plan should provide a stable environment that will provide support and assistance to the offender while searching for a job, attending counseling, seeking medical care, striving for financial stability and locating transportation. The offender will have conditions of parole that must be followed and family members can help the offender to follow them. This can be a stressful time that can cause an offender to relapse – but a strong family support system, the help of clergy and friends and mentors can help this not to happen.

Although a potential home provider may agree to accept an offender, the final decision still rests with the Board based on the individual circumstances of the case and the board's experience in supervising certain types of offenders.

The institutional parole staff will assist the offender with the home plan process, but they are not responsible for securing a home plan for an offender.

In deciding if a residence is suitable, a parole agent or parole investigator will obtain the following information and any other information deemed necessary regarding the proposed home:

- Name and relationship to offender of person offering the home
- Name and phone number of person interviewed
- Location of home, including the type of neighborhood
- Proximity to employment and availability of public transportation

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- List of the occupants and their relationship to offender, age, sources of income, criminal records and feelings toward offender
 - Potential sources of conflict
 - Responsibilities of the offender: rent, room, and rules
 - Whether or not weapons are present in the home
 - Determine if a telephone is available
 - Any history of domestic violence with members of the household
 - Confirm that the home provider is aware of the offender's criminal record

The investigating parole agent must provide potential home providers with the following information:

- Agent's role, responsibilities and contact information
- Parole conditions and their impact on those residing in the home (see general parole conditions)
- Moving/travel restrictions: the offender cannot move or leave the district without permission from the parole agent
- Board's weapons policy - **No weapons are allowed in the home**
- **The agent's ability to conduct searches and make unannounced visits – without a warrant**

If Granted Parole...

If granted parole, the board may parole the offender to an approved home plan (private residence), a Department of Corrections (DOC)-operated Community Corrections Center (CCC), or a privately operated facility (CCF) that operates under contract to the DOC.

If granted parole to a CCC or CCF, the DOC will determine a bed date for the offender, based on where he plans to live and any special treatment needs he requires. DOC tries to place offenders in CCCs as close as possible to the offender's proposed home area or the committing county.

The offender's family members, friends, or previous employers can assist the offender in applying for employment while the offender is still incarcerated. Institutional counselors and institutional parole agents will provide guidance as appropriate – they do not have lists of employers willing to hire offenders.

Home plans are investigated by the agent who will supervise the offender after the offender receives a Board Action, which is the official board decision, to grant parole.

There are a number of restrictions imposed on the home provider, and not everybody that offers an offender a home at first will be able to keep that offer after they learn all the rules.

If the provider is still willing to provide an offender with a residence, they also will have to provide a copy of proof of ownership of the property or verifiable contact information for the landlord to the investigating agent. ***Approved home plans are valid for 150 days from the date of approval.***

If an offender's home plan expires, or if the situation inside the home changes, the parole agent will have to recheck the offender's plan prior to his release

Offenders with sex offense histories, violent criminal histories and medical concerns represent cases that may experience delays that do not fit the normal process and timing. These hard to place offenders need to work closely with their families and institutional parole agents to try to develop viable reentry plans.

It is in the offender's interest to remain aware of his home plan status and coordinate this information with his case manager at the prison. As a guideline, parole staff has approximately 30 days to approve or deny a new home plan proposal after the field agent receives it.

If an offender hopes to live in another state upon parole release, he should begin the planning process as early as possible. Interstate applications require payment of a \$100 fee upon application.

Timeline

If the offender is approaching his minimum sentence date:

- Approximately eight months before the minimum sentence date, the offender should be given a Statement of Residence and a Statement of Employment form.
- The offender should send the Statement of Residence form to the person(s) offering him a residence and the Statement of Employment form to potential employers.
- After the offender has received the Statement of Residence signed by the potential home provider or the Statement of Employment signed by the potential employer, it is the offender's responsibility to make sure the forms are given to his institutional parole agent.
- The investigation of a home plan is initiated shortly after an offender has been granted parole, which is often before the minimum sentence date.

If the offender has previously been denied parole:

- The offender's most recent Board Action will establish a proposed month for a parole review.
- The offender's institutional parole agent will instruct the offender on how to submit a proposed home plan three months prior to the scheduled parole interview month.

If the offender is in a CCC or halfway house:

- When the offender thinks he has found a valid home plan proposal, he contacts his DOC case manager or parole agent at the facility and provides him with this information.
- After the offender receives these materials back from the potential provider the materials are to be given to the offender's DOC case manager. The case manager will forward these materials to institutional parole staff for individual investigation by a field agent.

How is a home plan investigated?

The assigned parole agent will visit with the proposed home provider, in person, at the residence being offered.

The agent will give the home provider a copy of this brochure: *Preparing For Your Return To The Community: What Offenders and Their Families Need to Know*.

The agent will review the Home Provider Agreement Letter with the proposed home provider and have the home provider sign the form.

It is very important for the home provider to be available to meet with the agent.

Unanswered phone calls and a refusal to respond to business cards left in the door in a timely manner will result in a home plan rejection.

The agent will obtain input from local police, neighbors and other community members, and he or she will determine the availability of community resources to assist with reentry.

The following information will be recorded on a checklist by the agent:

- ✓ A business card was given to the home provider.
 - ✓ The general conditions of parole and possible special conditions for the offender were reviewed with the home provider.
 - ✓ The offense which the offender is currently convicted of will be disclosed to the proposed home provider. Information disclosed is limited to public information.
 - ✓ The procedure for the offender changing his residence was explained.
 - ✓ The proposed home provider restrictions regarding possessing firearms and other weapons and implications for home suitability were explained.
 - ✓ ***The agency's right to conduct warrantless searches of the approved residence was explained.***
 - ✓ The home provider was informed of the location and hours of the field parole office.
 - ✓ The home provider was informed that staff may conduct visits to the residence outside of the normal business hours.
 - ✓ The home plan provider was informed of the board's policy statement on domestic violence and was given a copy of the board's brochure: *Preparing For Your Return To The Community: What Offenders and Their Families Need to Know.*
 - ✓ Staff has determined the availability of a telephone in the residence and noted in the summary any lack of telephone access due to special features or Internet access.
 - ✓ The possibility of electronic monitoring restrictions was reviewed with the home provider.
 - ✓ Staff has listed all residents, their age, relationship to the offender, any source of income and any criminal record, for each.
 - ✓ Staff has toured the entire proposed residence and determined:
 - Any circumstances that would place the parole supervision staff in danger such as dangerous dogs.
 - The physical condition as far as habitability.
 - Any sources of conflict that may preclude approving the residence.
 - The number of exits in the home.
 - ✓ The responsibilities the home provider expects from the offender such as paying for rent, room, board, and any rules to which the offender must comply.
 - ✓ Whether the home provider is renting or leasing the residence. If so, staff must obtain the landlord's name, telephone number, and address and ask to see the lease.
 - ✓ If the plan is being submitted for investigation without employment, there must be verification of the availability of other forms of financial support such as family support, Social Security or disability benefits.
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Factors That Could Result in Home Plan Rejections

- Section 8 or other public housing sometimes does not permit offenders who were not previously on the lease in their housing units.
- Proposed residence has weapons or circumstances exist that would place the parole supervision staff in danger.
- The physical condition of the home is unsafe or unfit or inadequate sleeping arrangements.
- Conditions existing within the proposed home that would present the likelihood of the offender committing similar offenses or technical parole violations.
- The proposed home provider is not currently cooperative with parole supervision staff.
- The presence in the home of other parolees or those on probation for serious offenses which may increase the offender's risk of re-offending.
- Conditions leading to the offense are not re-established, such as when the victim or victim's family resides in the household or in close proximity, domestic violence issues, and sex offender issues.
- The proposed home provider is unwilling to agree to conditions contained in the home agreement or has inadequate household accommodations.

Inmate Obligations That Must Be Met Before Release

Most parole interviews occur four months prior to the offender's minimum sentence date, but the offender cannot be released before the minimum sentence date. Many things must happen prior to release. On average an offender is released within 4-6 weeks from the time they are notified of the decision to parole if their minimum date has passed.

After parole is granted, but before an inmate may be released to either a CCC or a home plan, the laws of Pennsylvania require completion of various actions.

Negative Pre-Release Drug Screening Test

Inmates with drug-related convictions or who have tested positive for drugs while in prison must test negative for illegal drugs. Test results are valid for 45 days.

Payment of Fees for Victims

Pennsylvania law requires inmates to pay a fee to a fund that provides certain services to victims of crime.

Submission of DNA Sample

All inmates currently incarcerated for certain misdemeanors or any felony offenses are required to provide a DNA sample. Inmates convicted of an offense requiring registration must register their home address, intended place of employment, and/or enrollment as a student with the Pennsylvania State Police.

Participation in Victim Impact Education Program

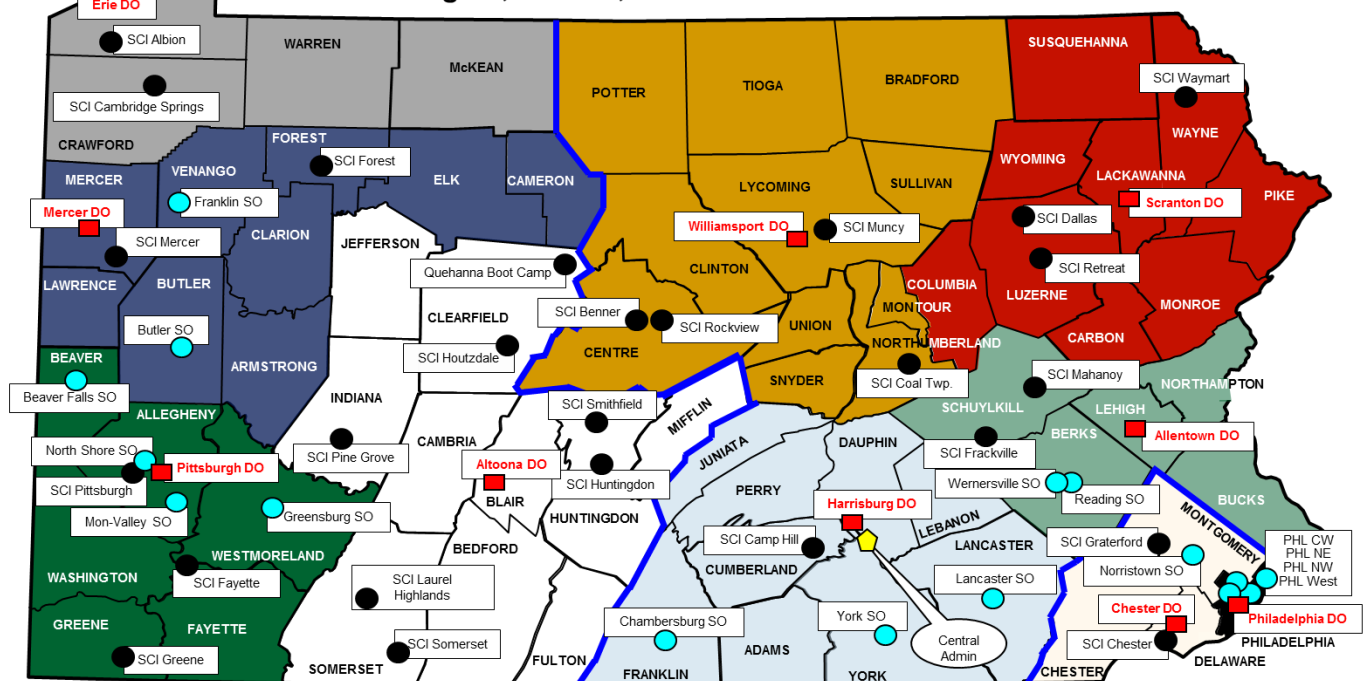
If an offender is convicted of a crime of violence, as defined by 42 Pa.C.S. § 9714(g), the offender must participate in a victim impact education program offered by the DOC.

General Conditions of Parole

- Must be under the supervision of a district office or sub office and not leave that district without prior written permission of the supervising parole agent.
- Must obtain prior written permission of the supervising parole agent in order to change residence.
- Must maintain regular contact with the parole agent by:
 1. Reporting regularly as instructed and following written instructions of agent.
 2. Notifying agent within 72 hours of an arrest, receipt of a summons, citation or offenses punishable by imprisonment.
 3. Notifying agent within 72 hours of a change in status including employment, on-the-job training and education.
- Must comply with state, county, local and federal criminal laws, regulations, ordinances, the vehicle code and the liquor code.
- Must abstain from the unlawful possession or sale of narcotics/drugs and from the use of controlled substances without a valid prescription.
- Must refrain from owning/possessing firearms or other weapons. This includes all firearms whether functional or not and includes facsimiles, muzzle loaders, archery equipment, etc.
- Must refrain from assaultive behavior, including physical and verbal assault.
- Must make continuing payments on fines, costs and restitution imposed by the sentencing court.

PA Board of Probation and Parole

Location of Region, District, Sub and Correctional Institution Field Offices



Western Region

Erie District	Altoona District
Mercer District	Pittsburgh District

Central Region

Williamsport District	Harrisburg District
Scranton District	Allentown District

Eastern Region

Chester District
Philadelphia District

■ PBPP District Office (10)

● PBPP Sub-Office (16)

● State Correctional Institution (26)