



Parole Board  
of Canada

Commission des libérations  
conditionnelles du Canada

# Parole Board *of* Canada:

CONTRIBUTING TO PUBLIC SAFETY

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*“The Parole Board contributes to the protection of society by facilitating, as appropriate, the timely reintegration of offenders as law abiding citizens.”*

## PAROLE BOARD OF CANADA

The Parole Board of Canada (PBC) is an independent administrative tribunal under Public Safety Canada.

The Board has exclusive authority, under the *Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA)*, to grant, deny, and revoke parole for offenders serving sentences of two years or more. The Board also makes parole decisions for offenders serving sentences of less than two years in all provinces and territories except Ontario and Quebec, which have their own parole boards.

## PAROLE

### What is parole?

Parole is a type of conditional release. It contributes to the protection of society by allowing some offenders to serve part of their sentence in the community under the supervision of a Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) parole officer, and subject to conditions.

### Why parole?

The majority of offenders are serving fixed-length sentences. This means they will eventually be released back into the community once their sentence ends.

Parole contributes to public safety by helping offenders re-integrate into society as law-abiding citizens through a gradual, controlled, and supported release with conditions.

### Myth

Most offenders commit new crimes while on parole.

### Fact

Over the past 10 years:

- 93% of offenders granted day and full parole by the PBC have not committed a new offence while on parole
- 99% have not committed a new violent offence while on parole

## Myth

Parole is automatically granted when an offender becomes eligible.

## Fact

Eligibility does not mean parole will be granted. Parole is never guaranteed. By law, public safety is always the primary consideration in all parole decisions.

## Types of conditional release

### *Temporary absences*

Temporary absences are the first type of release that an offender may receive. Temporary absences may be escorted (ETA) or unescorted (UTA). This type of release may be authorized for various reasons, including for work in community service projects, contact with family, personal development, and medical reasons.

#### **Eligibility:**

**ETA** – Offenders may apply for ETAs at any time during their sentence. Most ETAs are at the discretion of the Correctional Service of Canada, while others (e.g. some life sentences) must be approved by the Parole Board.

**UTA** – For sentences of 3 years or more, offenders are eligible for UTAs after serving 1/6 of their sentence. For sentences of 2-3 years, UTA eligibility is at 6 months into the sentence. Offenders serving life sentences are eligible for UTAs 3 years before their full parole eligibility date. Offenders classified as maximum security are not eligible for UTAs.

*“The majority of offenders do not re-offend while on parole.  
Less than 1% re-offend violently while on parole.”*

## **Day parole (DP)**

Day parole allows an offender to participate in community-based activities in preparation for full parole or statutory release. Offenders on day parole must return nightly to a community-based residential facility or halfway house unless otherwise authorized by the Parole Board of Canada. In addition to standard conditions of day parole, the Parole Board may also impose special conditions that an offender must abide by during release.

**Eligibility:** 6 months before full parole eligibility date (PED) or 6 months into the sentence, whichever is greater. For offenders serving life sentences, 3 years before PED.

## **Full parole (FP)**

Full parole allows an offender to serve part of their sentence under supervision in the community under specific conditions. Full parole normally follows successful completion of day parole. Offenders on full parole typically reside in a private residence.

For offenders serving determinate sentences, full parole prepares them for their eventual release to the community following completion of their sentence.

**Eligibility:** At 1/3 of sentence, or 7 years, whichever is less. For offenders serving a life sentence, parole eligibility is set by the Court at the time of sentencing. For first degree murder, eligibility is automatically set at 25 years, and for second degree murder, eligibility may be set at between 10 to 25 years.

## **Myth**

Offenders on parole are free to live their lives as they please.

## **Fact**

Offenders on parole must obey the law and follow standard conditions, such as to report regularly to a parole officer. The Parole Board can also impose special conditions, such as to abstain from the use of drugs or alcohol, or to reside in a halfway house.

*“Evidence shows that the gradual, controlled and supervised release of an offender is the most effective way of ensuring public safety.”*

## Myth

The Board can detain any offender from being released on Statutory Release (SR) at 2/3's of their sentence.

## Fact

Statutory Release is a release by law. In specific cases, on referral by CSC, the Board can decide to detain an offender if it is satisfied that the offender is likely to commit an offence, before the sentence ends, involving:

- death or serious physical or psychological harm,
- a sexual offence involving a child, or
- a serious drug offence.

## Statutory Release (SR)

Statutory release is a mandatory release by law. It is not parole and is not a decision of the Parole Board of Canada. By law, most offenders (except those serving a life or indeterminate sentence) must be released by the Correctional Service of Canada with supervision after serving 2/3's of their sentence, if parole has not already been granted.

Offenders on SR are required to follow standard conditions which include reporting to a parole officer, remaining within geographic boundaries, and obeying the law and keeping the peace. The Parole Board can also impose special conditions specific to the offender. In some instances offenders on SR are required to reside in a halfway house or community correctional centre operated by CSC.

Statutory release aims to provide offenders structure and support before their sentence expires to improve the chances of their successful reintegration into the community. Offenders can be returned to custody if they violate their conditions of release or are believed to present an undue risk to the public.

CSC can refer SR cases to the Parole Board for detention until the end of the sentence. The Board may, in specific cases where the legal criteria are met, order these offenders to be detained in prison until the end of their sentence.

## Who are Parole Board members?

Parole Board members reflect the diversity of Canadian society. They come from many different walks of life, such as criminology, law, police, social work, medicine, education, business, and private and public service management. Board members are trained in risk assessment and conditional release decision-making.

## How are parole decisions made?

Parole decisions are made by Board members either through an in-office file review (without a hearing) or a face-to-face hearing with the offender and their parole officer.

In addition to standard face-to-face hearings, offenders can request Elder-assisted hearings and community-assisted hearings. Elder-assisted hearings involve an Aboriginal Elder or advisor and are held in a circle format. Community-assisted hearings also include an Aboriginal Elder or advisor, but are usually held in the community where the offender plans to live.

*“Parole does not reduce the original sentence imposed by the court. For example, an offender serving a life sentence will remain under the supervision of CSC for the rest of their lives.”*

*“Public safety is the primary consideration in all conditional release decisions.”*

## Information used by Board members in parole decisions

Board members consider all relevant and available information in assessing an offender’s risk to re-offend.

Information from the police, courts, Crown attorneys, mental health professionals, correctional authorities, private agencies, and victims of crime is used in assessing an offender’s risk to re-offend and whether that risk can be safely managed in the community.

This information can take the form of judges’ sentencing comments or recommendations, employment history, and psychological and/or psychiatric assessments, for example.

Board members also refer to actuarial assessments and risk assessment tools.

## The Decision-Making Process

The *CCRA* includes **two basic principles** which guide the Parole Board in its conditional release decision-making:

1. That the **protection of society** be the paramount consideration in the determination of any case; and,
2. That the Board make the **least restrictive determination** consistent with the protection of society.



*“If an offender fails to comply with any of their conditions of release, their parole can be revoked and the offender returned to prison.”*

The Parole Board considers two things when making conditional release decisions, whether:

- the offender will not present an undue risk to society before the end of the sentence; and
- the release of the offender will contribute to the protection of society by facilitating the offender’s return to the community as a law-abiding citizen.

**Board members conduct a thorough risk assessment in all cases, taking into consideration the following information:**

- An offender’s social and criminal history, any systemic or background factors that may have contributed to the offender’s involvement with the criminal justice system, the reasons for and type of offence(s) including the offender’s understanding of the offence and any past offences;
- Any progress made by the offender through participation in programs, their behaviour in the institution and while on previous conditional release(s);
- Actuarial assessments and risk assessment tools;
- Any victim statements;
- The offender’s release plan and community supports.

## Myth

The Parole Board considers prison overcrowding, quotas, the political climate, and public sentiment when making its decisions.

## Fact

The Parole Board is an independent administrative tribunal that operates at arm’s-length from government and free from outside influence. Its decisions are based on a thorough risk assessment of all relevant and available information.

## Myth

Victims do not have a voice in the conditional release process.

## Fact

Victims can attend hearings, present a victim statement, and request that special conditions be placed on the release of an offender. Over the past 5 years, more than 1,000 victim statements have been presented at Parole Board hearings.

## Conditions of Release

**Standard Conditions** – All offenders released on conditional release must abide by a set of standard conditions. These include reporting to a parole officer, obeying the law and keeping the peace, not owning or possessing a weapon, and reporting any change in their family, domestic or financial situation to their parole officer.

**Special Conditions** – The Parole Board may also impose any special conditions it considers reasonable and necessary to further manage an offender's risk in the community, such as to abstain from the use of drugs or alcohol. The Board also takes into account requests from victims to impose special conditions. The most common request is for no contact with the victim or their family members.

## Victims

Victims and their families can provide information to the Parole Board that they feel may help it to assess the risk posed by an offender. This can include a description of the harm or loss they have suffered as a result of the offence.

Victims may also receive information on the offender who harmed them while that person is under the jurisdiction of the Board, such as parole eligibility dates and hearing dates. Victims must register to receive this information.

Victims may also attend hearings as observers, provide a victim statement in writing or in-person at a hearing, and request written

*“The Parole Board operates in an open and transparent manner. In the last 5 years, over 8,500 people have observed a hearing, and over 28,000 decisions have been released to the public.”*

Board decisions. Victims may also qualify for financial assistance to attend a hearing through the Department of Justice Canada’s Victims Fund.

## Observing a Hearing

Individuals can apply to observe a hearing. This contributes to greater public understanding of conditional release decision-making and promotes openness and accountability in the Board’s operations.

To observe a parole hearing, a request form should be submitted to the PBC regional office where the hearing will be held as far in advance as possible (at least 30 days). Regional office contact information is available at the back of this booklet.

## Decision Registry

The Parole Board maintains a registry of its decisions. Anyone can request a copy of a decision.

Decision request forms are available at [www.pbc-clcc.gc.ca](http://www.pbc-clcc.gc.ca) or from any regional PBC office.

FOR A VIRTUAL TOUR OF A PAROLE HEARING, VISIT:

[www.pbc-clcc.gc.ca](http://www.pbc-clcc.gc.ca)

## Myth

Parole Board hearings are held behind closed doors and its decisions are secret.

## Fact

Members of the public may attend Parole Board hearings. In addition, copies of decisions are available by written request through the Board’s Decision Registry.

## Parole Board of Canada Offices

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