

# The Role of Parole in the Criminal Justice System

Presentation for the Maine Commission to Examine  
Reestablishing Parole  
October 2022

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Rhode Island Parole Board: 1992-2016

# The National Context

Sixteen states have abolished or severely curtailed discretionary parole. The remaining states range from having a system of presumptive parole (when certain conditions are met, release on parole is guaranteed) to having policies and practices that make earning parole release very difficult.

Source: Renaud, J. (2019). Grading the Parole Release Systems of All 50 States. *Prison Policy Initiative*.  
[https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/grading\\_parole.html](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/grading_parole.html)

Self-Described  
Conservative  
Florida Criminal  
Justice Reform  
Group (*Right on  
Crime*)  
Favors Reinstating  
Parole

“Risk and cost analysis of re-instating parole deserves consideration, but the benefits of parole are far too great to ignore. A moderate reintroduction of parole is long overdue, and modifying Florida’s truth in sentencing thresholds, even gradually, will provide incentive for productive behavior and supervision.”

Source: Murphy, C. (2022, June). Addressing Florida’s Parole System.

<https://rightoncrime.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-06-ROC-AddressingFloridasParoleSystem-ChelseaMurphy-ROC-Version.pdf>

# Principal Arguments Supporting Reinstatement

- Some—albeit not all—reputable empirical research documents lower recidivism rates among parolees compared with offenders released on probation and those who complete their sentences without supervision
- The prospect of a parole hearing provides an incentive for inmates to enroll in rehabilitative and educational programs
- My anecdotal experience over more than a quarter century is that participation on parole increases the likelihood of leading a productive life (family, employment) because of life skills learned on parole and therapeutic gains.
- Parole caseloads are typically smaller than probation caseloads—closer supervision
- Parole supervision is significantly less expensive than incarceration.

## Reinstating Parole: A Multi- State Debate

“We thought we were fighting crime, and it didn’t work,” said David Marsden, a Democratic state senator in Virginia, who has previously introduced bills to restore parole but was blocked by Republican majorities. “But more recently, we’ve stopped trying to teach lessons and started trying to solve problems. People are now more likely to believe that people deserve a second chance.”

Williams, T. (2020, February 13). ‘It Didn’t Work:’ States That Ended Parole for Violent Crimes Are Thinking Again. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/13/us/parole-virginia.html>

# Prominent Research Studies

- Solomon, A. (2006). Does Parole Supervision Work? Research Findings and Policy Opportunities, American Probation and Parole Association.  
<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/50221/1000908-Does-Parole-Supervision-Work-.PDF>
- Ooi, E., & Wang, J. (2022). The Effect of Parole Supervision on Recidivism. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.  
<https://www.bocsar.nsw.gov.au/Publications/CJB/2022-Report-Effect-of-parole-supervision-on-recidivism-CJB245.pdf>
- Ostermann, M. Active Supervision and Its Impact Upon Parolee Recidivism Rates. *Crime and Delinquency*, 59(4), 487-509.  
<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/active-supervision-and-its-impact-upon-parolee-recidivism-rates>

Post-Release  
Outcomes: One  
Size Does Not  
Fit All  
The Typology of  
Criminal  
Circumstances  
(Reamer)

- Crimes of *Desperation*
- Crimes of *Greed, Exploitation, and Opportunism*
- Crimes of *Rage*
- Crimes of *Revenge and Retribution*
- Crimes of *Frolic*
- Crimes of *Addiction*
- Crimes of *Mental Illness*

# Crimes of Desperation

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Financial desperation and poverty

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White-collar financial desperation

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Crimes of fear

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Desperate personal circumstances



# Crimes of Greed, Exploitation, and Opportunism

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Financial  
crimes

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Organized  
crime

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Gang  
exploitation

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Sexual  
exploitation

# Crimes of Rage

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Family and relationship  
violence

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Social violence

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Workplace violence

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Stranger rage

# Crimes of Revenge and Retribution

- Family and relationship revenge and retribution
- Acquaintance revenge and retribution
- Coworker revenge and retribution
- Authority figure revenge and retribution

# Crimes of Frolic

- Thrill-seeking behavior
- Entertainment
- Frolic under the influence

# Crimes of Addiction

- Substance abuse
- Pathological gambling

# Crimes of Mental Illness

- Schizophrenia and psychotic disorders
- Mood disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Paraphilias
- Mental retardation
- Dissociative disorders

# Key Release Criteria

1. Seriousness of offense
2. Insight
3. Victims' testimony
4. Criminal record
5. Program participation
6. Prison discipline
7. Release plan

This  
material is  
drawn  
from:

- Frederic G. Reamer, *On the Parole Board: Reflections on Crime, Punishment, Redemption, and Justice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2016.
- Frederic G. Reamer, *Criminal Lessons: Case Studies and Commentary on Crime and Justice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Frederic G. Reamer, *Heinous Crime: Cases, Causes, and Consequences*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.