

Comparison of Parole Systems

Federal parole began in 1910 and was abolished via the Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984. Those convicted prior to 1987 in the federal system are still eligible for parole consideration today. The US Parole Commission conducts parole hearings on inmates still eligible in the federal system as well as the District of Columbia. Under the federal system, offenders serve 85% of the maximum term with the remaining 15% served as a period of supervision.

14 US States followed the Federal Government's move to abolish parole, but all the States have some type of parole board or releasing authority in place today.

Nevada started parole in 1909 and parolees reported once a month to the Governor's private secretary. There have been a number of changes to Nevada's parole process over the years in conjunction with State growth. Based on Nevada's current system of awarding credits to offenders in prison (with the most common rate of 2 days for each 1 day served), most inmates will expire a sentence after serving 50% of the maximum term imposed. Minimum sentence terms may not exceed 40% of the maximum sentence imposed. Only the least serious sentences receive credits off the minimum term.

Because of the volume of credits available to reduce the maximum term, when an unreduced maximum-minimum term is imposed, an offender may only have about 10% of the original maximum sentence left to serve when they are eligible for parole.

For example: A 4-10 year term is imposed for a category B felony. The inmate earns 2-for-1 credits so will expire in 5 years, but the 4-year minimum term is not reduced. When the inmate becomes eligible for parole, they will only have 1 year left of the sentence, which is 10% of the original imposed term of 10 years.

Nevada is one of only 13 states that give credits off the maximum sentence.

As of 2009, 800,000 people were on parole supervision in various jurisdictions throughout the United States. Nevada's year-round average parolee population is approximately 4,000.

How Hearings are Conducted:

Most states conduct primarily face-to-face hearings (in-person or via video conference). The majority of parole release hearings in Nevada are conducted via video-conference (inmates on residential confinement may attend physically in-person at the Parole Board office, and hearings on inmates housed in out-of-state confinement are conducted via telephone).

Parole violation hearings in Nevada are conducted physically in-person at the NDOC intake centers at HDSP, NNCC or FMWCC.

Board Appointments:

Most members of State parole boards or releasing authorities are appointed by their respective State Governor, as is in Nevada. Most releasing authorities, including Nevada's, are independent agencies. One primary reason for ensuring a releasing authority is independent from a Director of Prisons or another agencies supervision is to ensure decisions are made based on best practices rather than fear of job security.

Release Evaluation Instruments:

Most parole boards (including Nevada) use some form of a guideline or risk-based assessment as part of the decision making process. Other factors considered can include the offense severity and characteristics, the type of offense and offender criminal history.

Input of Outside Information at Parole Hearings:

The top three sources of input considered by parole board's or releasing authorities come from the victim of the crime, family or friends of the offender, and law enforcement agencies. This is Nevada's Parole Board experience as well. As a side note, not all victims oppose parole and not all offender family members desire parole. In almost all cases though, there is a desire that the offender receive the help they need to avoid future criminal activity.

Correctional and Rehabilitative Programming:

Nearly all States report the lack of sufficient programming within the Department of Corrections which impacts the parole release process. This is also true in Nevada.

Transition:

Transition, like adequate programming is also a concern. One of the most difficult issues related to the release of an offender who has served a substantial amount of time in prison is related to adequate transition back to the community. This is a particular concern in Nevada. While Nevada has two transition centers, some offenders are excluded from participation in that transition (because of the type of crime). Imagine trying to re-enter the community today after having entered prison when there were no cell phones or Internet.

In Summation:

Parole Boards/Releasing Agencies through-out the States have very similar practices and challenges.