

# 2019 Annual Report

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**Louisiana Board of Pardons  
& Committee on Parole**



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## Our Mission

To serve the citizens of Louisiana through informed decision-making, thereby promoting public safety, addressing the needs of crime victims, and to facilitate successful reentry for offenders who have appropriately prepared for community supervision.

## Our Vision

The Louisiana Board of Pardons & Parole, guided by evidence-based principles, shall:

- Render just determination in regard to parole release and revocations, thereby maximizing the restoration of human potential;
- Ensure crime victims have a voice in the decision-making process;
- Use appropriate Department of Corrections and community resources to facilitate an offender's successful transition from confinement to the community;
- Impose reasonable conditions of release consistent with the goal of structured reintegration of the offender;
- Hold accountable those offenders who violate the conditions of release;
- Foster a positive relationship with all stakeholders;
- Administer the clemency process with recommendation to the Governor fully commensurate with public safety and due consideration;
- Strive to be a continuously learning organization

## Our Values

We value Ethics, Integrity, Equity and Innovation.

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## Message from the Chairman



As required by Louisiana R.S. 15:574.2, on behalf of the dedicated staff of the Louisiana Board of Pardons & Parole, I am pleased to present the 2019 Annual Report. Throughout the report, we highlight the effectiveness of the Board's processes and how we serve the citizens of Louisiana.

The 2018-2019 fiscal year was another challenging year operationally. As a result of the justice reform legislation enacted in 2017, the board conducted 46% more parole hearings during this fiscal year as compared to FY 2016. Even so, the parole grant rate increased from 44% to 54% over the same period. We believe this is a direct result of reentry programs, which better prepare an offender for transition to the community. Further indicators of the impact of criminal justice reform as it relates to the work of the board is seen in other statistics throughout this report. Using 2016 as our baseline year, there has been a 21% reduction in revocation hearings conducted by the board, a 28% reduction in offenders whose parole supervision terminated unsatisfactorily, and a 16% reduction in parole violations or other actions executed by the board.

With the support of the Department of Public Safety & Corrections, throughout this fiscal year, we worked to expand services to victims through the Louisiana Victim Assistance Outreach Program. Partnerships were formed with various stakeholders and organizations during the year. We believe public safety is enhanced as we partner and engage with stakeholders and law enforcement agencies and organizations.

The Board continues to play a role in Louisiana's criminal justice system by ensuring public safety through the post release process. I am proud of all that our team has accomplished. The coming year promises to be both challenging and demanding. I am confident that given the skill and dedication of our staff members, ably led by our Executive Director, Francis Abbott, we will meet those challenges. I look forward to exploring new partnerships and successfully completing the many goals we have set as we work to keep Louisiana's communities safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sheryl M. Ranatza". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Sheryl M. Ranatza, Chairman

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## Board Members



### **SHERYL M. RANATZA, Board Chair**

Mrs. Ranatza retired from the position of Deputy Secretary with the LA Department of Public Safety and Corrections after a Corrections career of over 30 years, which included service as Deputy Warden at Louisiana State Penitentiary for 14 years. She served in a variety of management positions throughout the DOC. She has served as Chairman of the Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole since 2012.



### **KEITH JONES**

A Baton Rouge attorney, Mr. Jones has practiced law in Baton Rouge since 1976. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Louisiana Tech University in 1973 and his Juris Doctorate degree from LSU Law Center in 1976. He is licensed to practice before all Louisiana courts and the United States Supreme Court. Through his law practice, Mr. Jones has been exposed to various facets of criminal justice and has always had an interest in Louisiana's corrections system and the offender population.



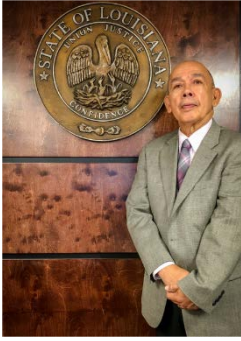
### **BRENNAN C. KELSEY, Committee on Parole**

Mr. Kelsey is a Physical Therapist with over 20 years of experience in the healthcare field. Mr. Kelsey has worked in a variety of settings including mental health, outpatient, rehab and acute care. Mr. Kelsey is a graduate of LSU Medical Center and received his MBA in General Business and Healthcare from Southeastern Louisiana University. Governor John Bel Edwards appointed Mr. Kelsey to serve as an at-large member of the Committee on Parole.



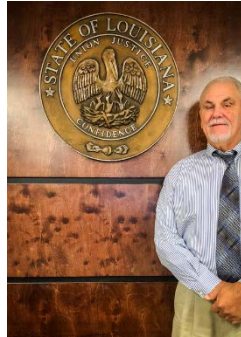
### **KENNETH A. LOFTIN**

Mr. Loftin retired in 2015 after serving as Executive Director of Ware Youth Center in Coushatta for 27 years. Prior to his position at Ware, Mr. Loftin served as a Child Protective Investigator for the State of Louisiana's Office of Community Services. Mr. Loftin received his Bachelor of Arts Degree in Behavioral Sciences with a concentration in psychology and sociology and a minor in religion from East Texas Baptist College.



### **ALVIN ROCHE', JR.**

Mr. Roche' served as the Director of Library Services at Southern University Law Center for 17 years until his retirement in 2007. He was previously an Associate Law Librarian and Associate Professor at the University Library. Mr. Roche' received his BS Degree in Social Science-History with a minor in Library Science from Southern University and a Masters of Library Services from Louisiana State University. Mr. Roche' serves on the Board and Committee as the victims' advocate.



### **JIM WISE**

After studying criminal justice at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, and completing the Calcasieu Regional Law Enforcement Training Academy, Mr. Wise served as a deputy in the Vernon Parish Sheriff's Office for 18 years as supervisor over all uniformed divisions. He later served as an Investigator at Louisiana State Penitentiary. Mr. Wise was first appointed to the Louisiana Parole Board in 2004 and was appointed to the Pardon Board in August 2012. He is the longest serving member.



### **PEARL WISE, Committee on Parole**

A veteran of the Louisiana National Guard, Ms. Wise's criminal justice career spanned over 20 years. She worked with the Division of Probation & Parole, working with parolees and supervising parole officers. Ms. Wise received her Master's Degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Louisiana Monroe. Governor John Bel Edwards appointed Ms. Wise to serve as an at-large member of the Committee on Parole in February 2016.

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## Structure

In 2012, the duties, functions, and powers of the Board of Pardons were merged with that of the Board of Parole, creating a Committee on Parole.

All members of the Board are appointed by the Governor and are subject to confirmation by the Louisiana Senate. There are five members of the Board of Pardons. The Committee on Parole, a committee within the Board of Pardons, is composed of the five members of the Board of Pardons and two at-large members appointed by the Governor. The at-large members serve only as members of the Committee on Parole and do not serve as members of the Board of Pardons.

In addition to the appointed members, the Warden of the facility in which the offender is housed serves as an ex-officio member of the Board. The ex-officio member is not a voting member, nor is he counted for the purposes of the members necessary to take Board action.

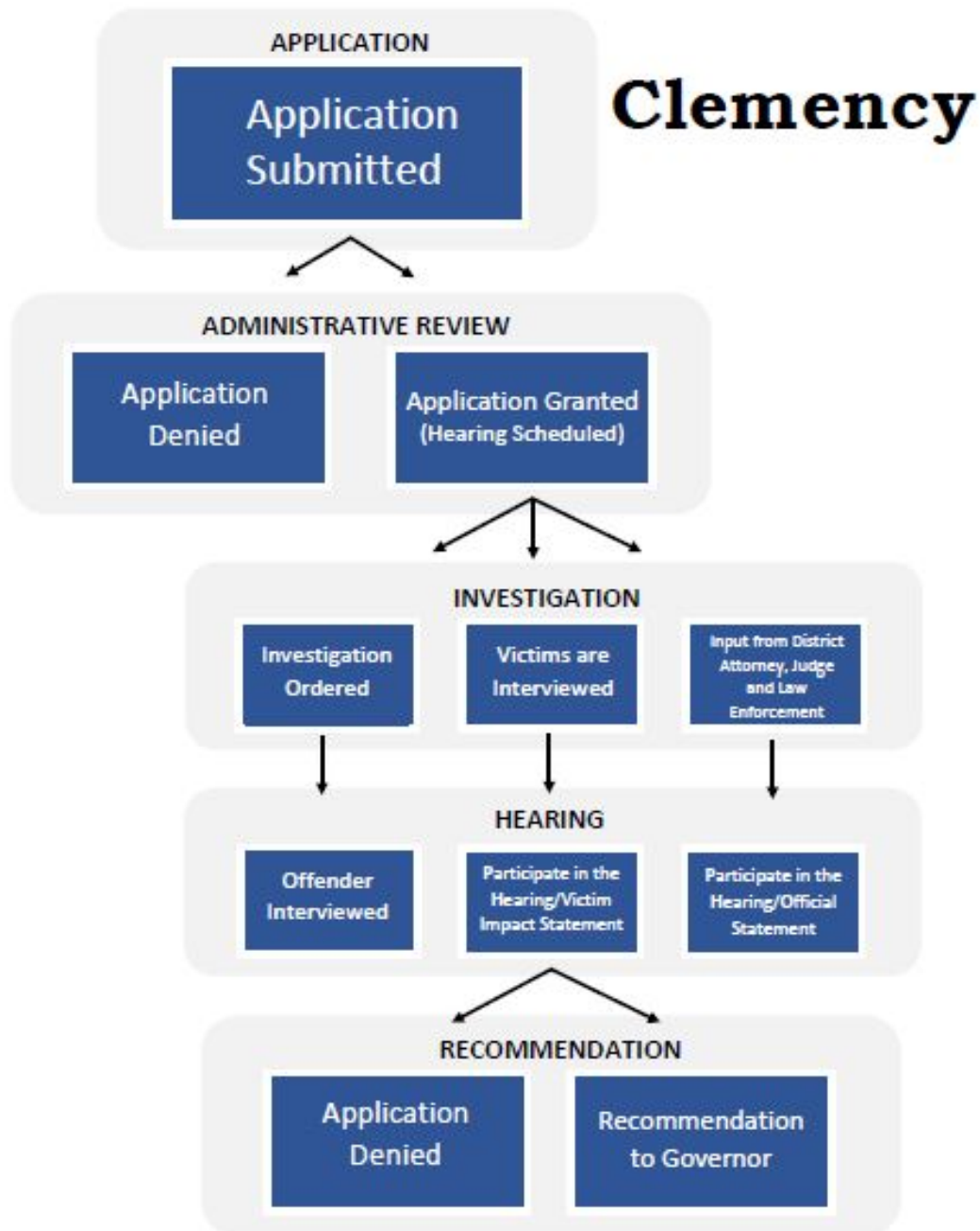
Members must have a bachelor's degree and at least five years of experience in the field of penology, corrections, law enforcement, sociology, law, education, social work, medicine, psychology or psychiatry, or a combination thereof. If the member does not have at least a bachelor's degree, he or she must have no less than seven years of experience in one of the aforementioned fields. Appointees are also required to complete a comprehensive orientation-training program within 90 days of their appointment and forty hours of in-service training annually. Training components include, but are not limited to:

- Data driven decision-making, using evidence-based practices for determining offender risk and needs;
- Stakeholder collaboration;
- Recidivism reduction;
- Dynamics of criminal victimization;
- Security classifications.

The Board's recommendations for clemency are forwarded to the Governor for final action. There are no time limits within which the Governor must act on any recommendation submitted by the Board of Pardons. However, the Committee on Parole is the sole authority for granting parole in Louisiana.

# Clemency Process

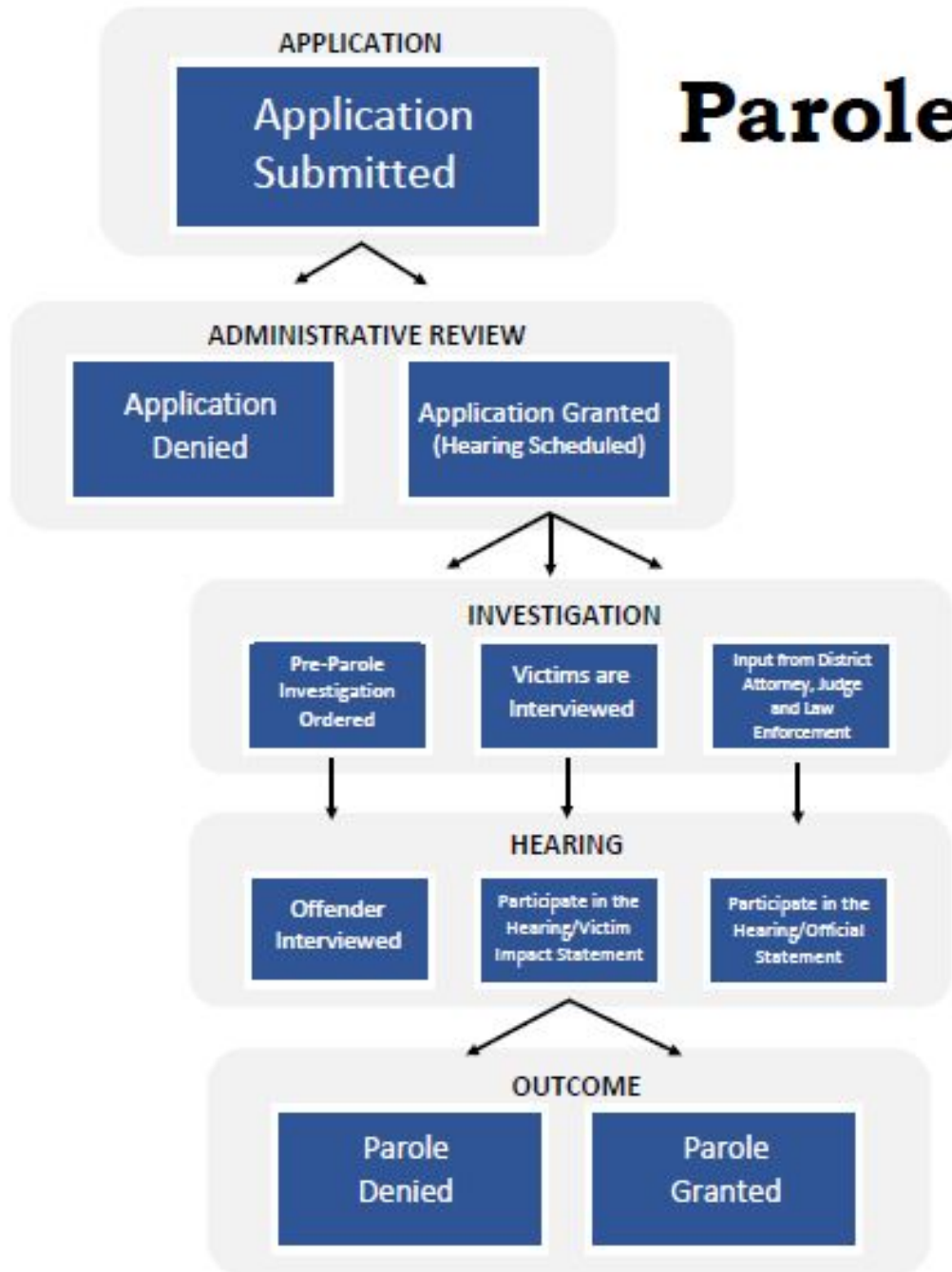
The governor may grant reprieves to persons convicted of offenses against the state, and upon recommendation of the Board of Pardons, may commute sentences, pardon those convicted of offenses against the state, and remit fines and forfeitures imposed for such offenses. Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, the governor shall not grant any pardon to any person unless that person has paid all of the court costs or fees imposed in connection with the conviction of the crime for which the pardon is to be issued.





# Parole Process

The Committee on Parole makes a variety of critical decisions concerning the timing of release, conditions to be imposed, and supervision strategies. Determination of release suitability of eligible offenders is made through decisions that promote fairness, objectivity, and public safety and are responsive to the concerns of victims, members of the community, and other persons within the criminal justice system.



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The Committee meets in panels comprised of at least three members. Three-member panels are randomly assigned in such a manner as to result in the smallest probability of having a panel constituted by the same three members for two consecutive months.

Any person convicted of a crime of violence against any peace officer requires a five-member parole panel. A person serving a life sentence for second-degree murder, committed after July 2, 1973 and prior to June 20, 1979, requires a five-member parole panel.

## What is Considered

Every eligible offender is given a meaningful opportunity for parole. The Committee considers pertinent and available information relative to an offender six to nine months prior to the parole eligibility date. The Committee exercises its discretionary releasing authority based upon consideration of the unique factors of each individual case. Shown below are the guideline used for consideration; however, the guidelines are not to be construed so as to mandate either a favorable or unfavorable parole decision. A parole decision is at the discretion of each individual parole panel member.

- Nature and circumstances of the crime
- Prior criminal record
- Character, social background, and emotional and physical condition
- Institutional adjustment
- Law Enforcement, judicial, and community attitude toward the offender
- Parole plan
- Program participation
- Risk assessment

## Conditions of Release

All discretionary parole releases and mandatory releases (diminution of sentence/good-time) releases are subject to general conditions of supervision. The Committee on Parole may also require, either at the time of release on parole or at any time while the offender remains on parole, special conditions which are deemed appropriate to the circumstances of the particular case.

## Rehabilitative Programs

While many of the offenders who appear before a parole panel have been exposed to DOC certified treatment and rehabilitative programs, some still have not received programming that addresses their

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reasons for incarceration. The Board’s support staff reviews offender records prior to parole hearings to identify offenders who may have special needs. The ultimate goal in these situations would be to place the offender in appropriate programming at a facility close to their post-release residence plan so they can maintain and strengthen family ties.

The current focus is on the following risk factors and possible program opportunities:

- **Substance Abuse**
  - Medical Assisted Treatment
  - Long Term and Short Term
- **Mental Health**
  - Evaluations
  - Medicaid / Medicare Sign Up
  - After Care Plan
  - Specialized Parole Agents
- **Employability**
  - Expanding use of Transitional Work Program
  - Basic Vocational Training
- **Education**
  - Literacy
  - Adult Basic Education
  - HiSet

## **Prescriptive Bundles**

Law requires that parole release must occur within six to nine months from the day of the parole hearing. While parole release may be denied due to lack of rehabilitative programming, in some cases the offender may not have had the opportunity to participate in programming. On the other hand, if parole release is granted, the Board may require that the offender complete a specific rehabilitation program prior to release. For some offenders, particularly those who have been incarcerated for many years, program completion may take longer than nine months. To address this issue, the Board is developing a Denial Referral System to outline a prescriptive bundle for an offender who has been denied parole, track their program progress and completion, and expedite that offender’s scheduling for a subsequent parole hearing. The prescriptive bundle will be based on a validated risk/needs/responsivity tool.

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## Medical Treatment Furlough

One aspect of the 2017 criminal justice reform legislation provided a mechanism for medical treatment furlough. An offender who is determined to be a limited-mobility offender may be considered by the Committee on Parole for medical treatment furlough release to an off-site medical facility appropriate to the offender's medical treatment needs. The offender may only be released to a medical facility and may not be released to a residential setting. "Limited-mobility" is defined as an offender who is unable to perform activities of daily living without help or is bedbound, including but not limited to, prolonged coma and medical ventilation. Medical treatment furlough is not available to any offender serving a sentence for a conviction of first-degree murder. Table 3 on the following page illustrates board action on those medical treatment furlough recommendations presented by the DOC for consideration.

## Medical Parole

Medical Parole is in addition to any other parole for which an offender may be eligible. The offender must be determined to be permanently disabled (*unable to engage in substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical impairment which can be expected to result in death or which is or can be expected to be permanently irreversible*) or terminally ill (*any offender who is diagnosed with a terminal illness and death is expected within one year; the medical condition is usually permanent in nature and carries a poor prognosis*).

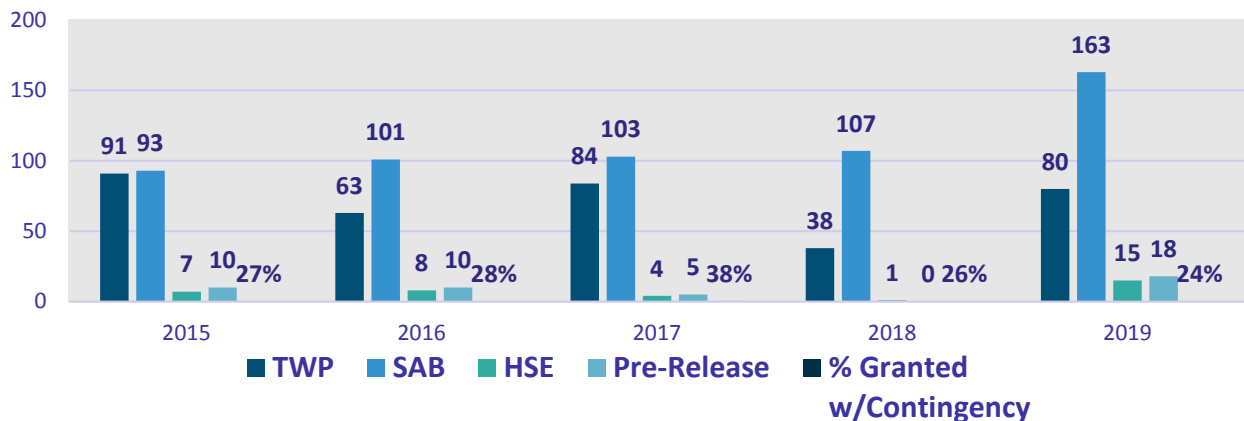
The Committee on Parole considers the offender's crime and criminal history, length of time served in custody, institutional conduct, whether the offender represents a low risk to himself or society, as well as an assessment of the offender's condition. In the assessment of risk, emphasis is given to the medical condition and how this relates to the overall risk to society. Medical parole is not available to any offender serving a sentence for a conviction of first or second-degree murder. If the offender's condition improves such that he is no longer eligible for medical parole, the medical parole may be revoked and the offender returned to custody.

***"There are many facets to the Pardon and Parole process, all of which greatly affect the lives of individuals who become involved. Whether it be victim, offender, relative or friend, it's a pleasure to help people get through the process."*** – Lea Wroten, Administrative Program

## Pardon and Parole Statistics

<b>Clemency Data</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
Pardon Applications Received	804	1247	1600	514	411
Applications Reviewed by Board	311	426	460	341	355
Hearing Opportunity Granted	176	221	205	171	240
Hearing Opportunity Denied	138	205	251	170	114
% of Applications Granted Opportunity for Hearing	56.6%	51.9%	44.6%	50.2%	67.6%
Clemency hearings conducted	171	185	344	167	177
<b>Relief Requested</b>					
Reprieve - Capital Case	0	0	0	0	0
Commutation of sentence	101	112	193	114	137
Executive Pardon	70	73	151	53	40
<b>Action Taken by the Board</b>					
Favorable Decision (Granted)	103	103	164	70	83
Unfavorable Decision (Denied)	51	68	130	72	73
Taken Under Advisement	17	14	50	25	21
Favorable recommendations to the Governor	89	103	162	70	83

**Table 1. Clemency.** Actions by the Pardon board. Commutation of sentence is available for incarcerated offenders. Executive pardon is available for offenders who have completed their sentence.

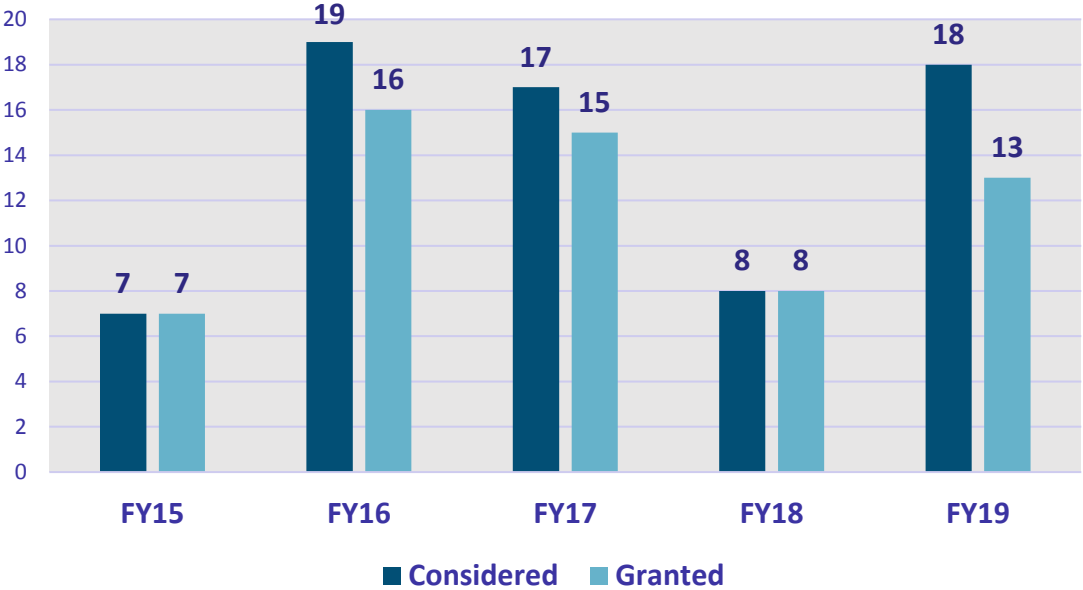


TWP: Transitional Work Program SAB: Substance Abuse Program HSE: High School Equivalency diploma PRE: Pre-Release Curriculum

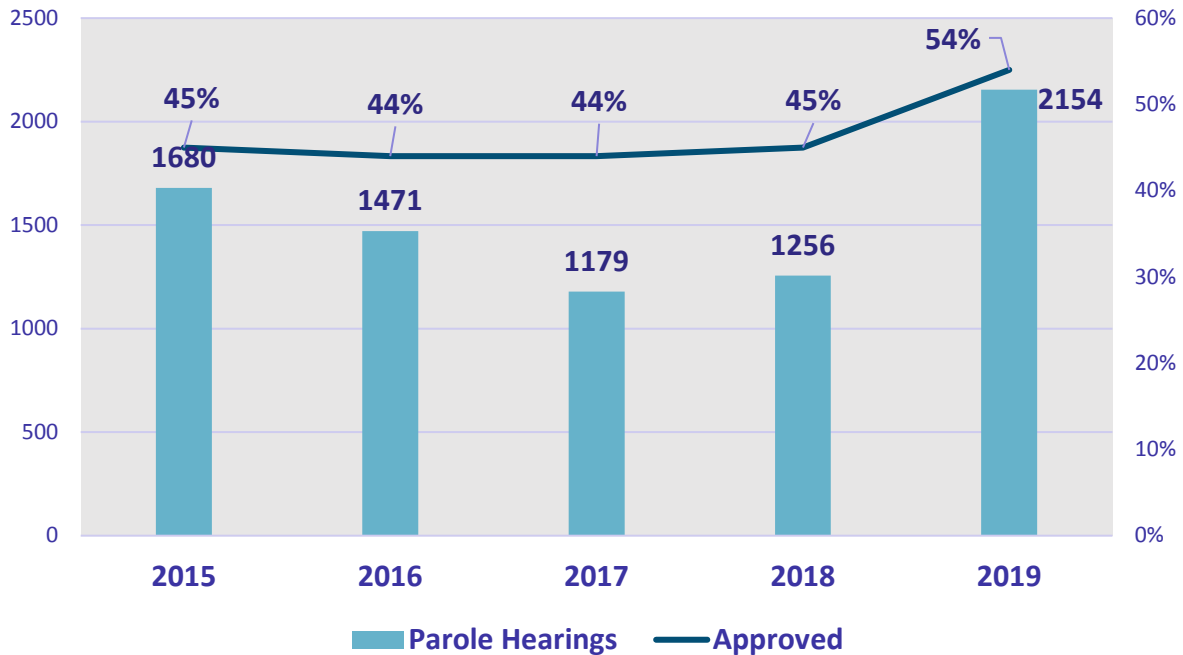
**Table 2. Parole granted with contingency.** Number of parolees granted with the requirement for program completion prior to parole release. Percentages reflect the percentage of all paroles granted that were granted with contingency.

Medical Treatment Furlough	Considered	Granted
2018	11	6
2019	9	5

**Table 3. Medical Treatment Furlough.** The number of medical treatment furlough recommendations presented to the Committee on Parole for consideration and the number that were granted.



**Table 4. Medical Parole.** The number of offenders recommended for medical parole by the DOC and the number of offenders granted medical parole by the Committee on Parole.

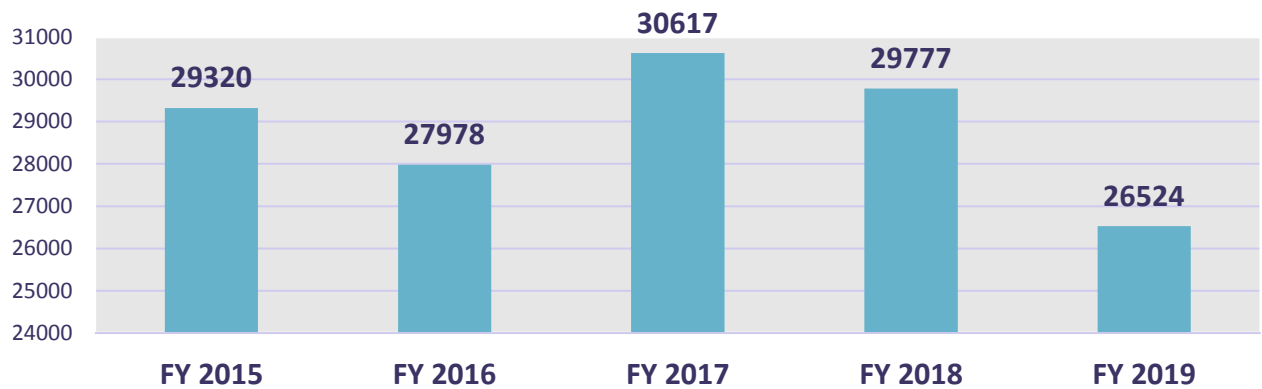


**Table 5. Parole Approval.** The number of parole hearings conducted by fiscal year and the percentage of paroles granted by the Committee on Parole. The increase in parole hearings in 2019 is a result of criminal justice reform.

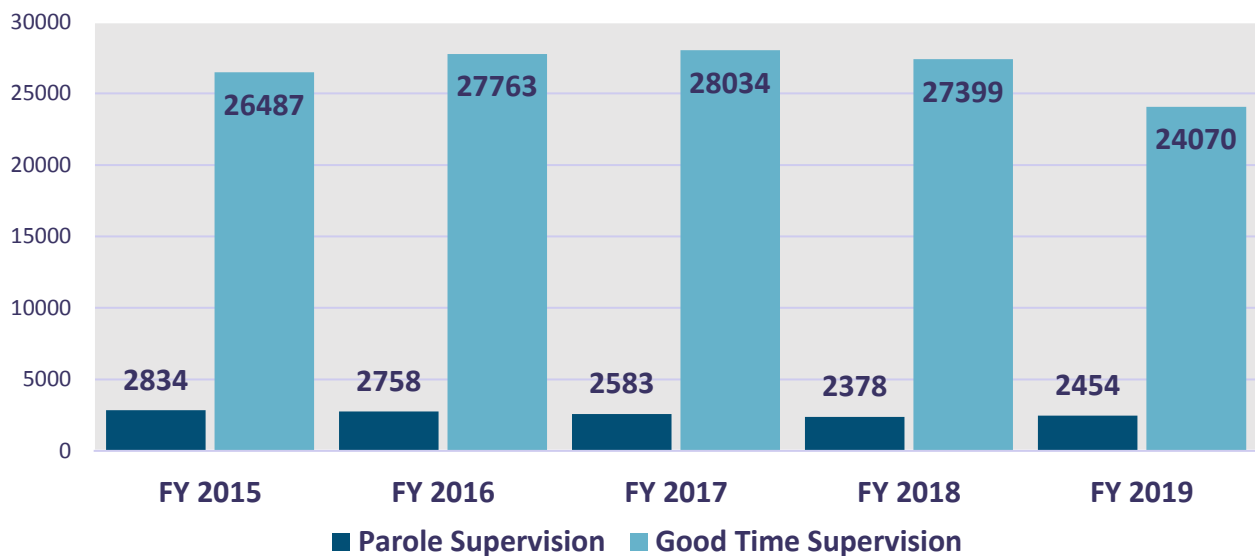
DOC defines recidivism as a return to custody following conviction for a new felony or revocation of supervision after having been released from incarceration. Offenders released to a detainer, released in error, deceased, or transferred to another jurisdiction are not included. Offenders are tracked for a period of time from date of released based on year of return. Recidivism is the primary measurement by which the Board gauges the effectiveness and value of its work.

Release Year	2015	2016	2017
Parolees Discharged	425	307	289
Parolees Returns - Any Offense	99	39	12
Percent Returned	22.6%	12.7%	4.2%
Total Prison Discharges	14822	13327	14463
Prison Returns - Any Offense	5357	3737	2077
Percent Returned	36.1%	28.0%	14.4%

**Table 6. Recidivism.** This table shows the comparative recidivism rates between parole releases and regular prison releases. The results are significantly better for the parole population.

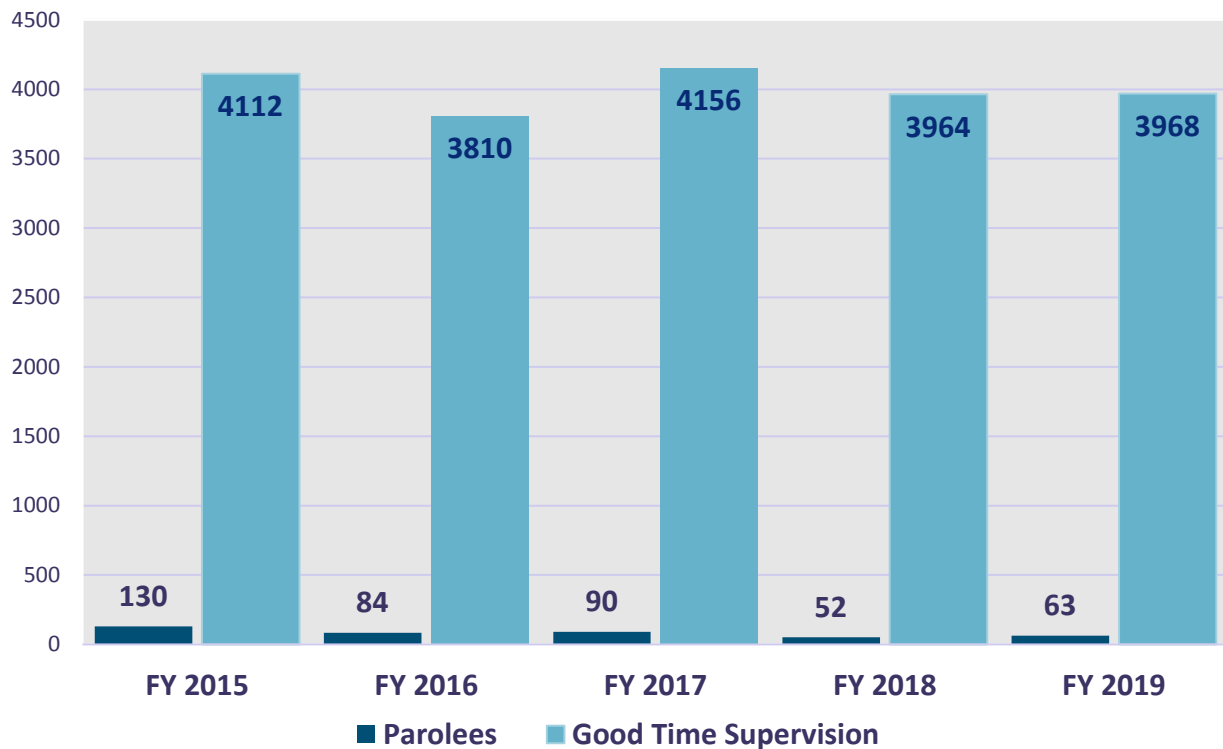


**Table 7. Community supervision.** Average number of offenders under jurisdiction of the Board of Pardons & Parole who are in the community under parole supervision.



**Table 8. Type of supervision.** Average number of offenders under jurisdiction of the board by type of supervision. Parole supervision reflects discretionary releases by the Committee on Parole. Good time supervision reflects mandatory releases via diminution of sentence.



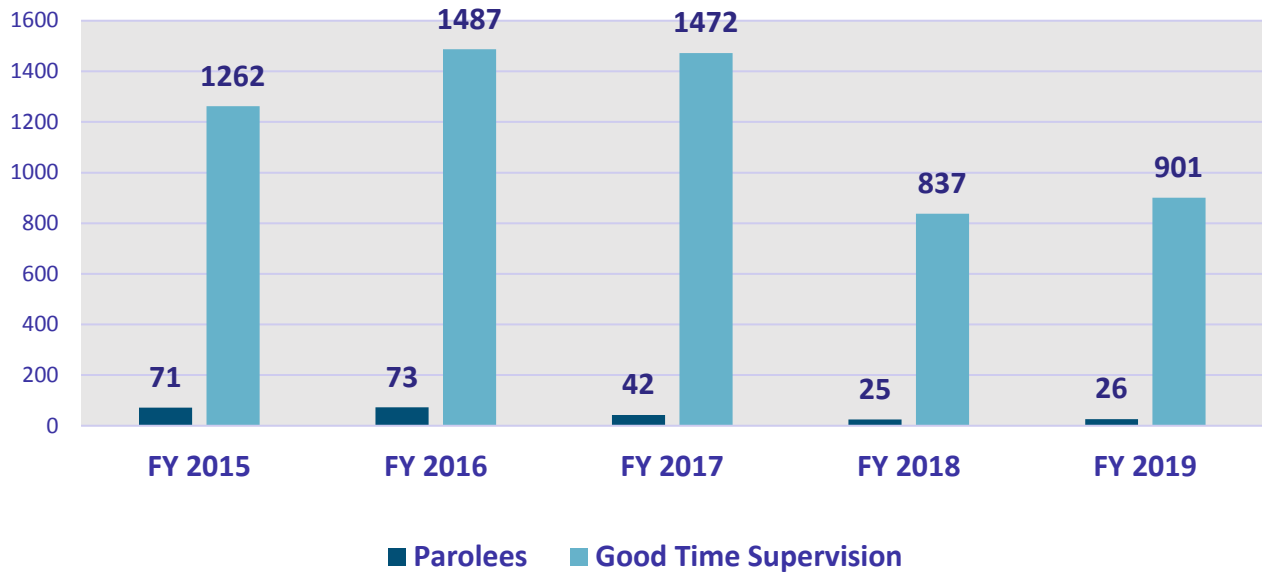


**Table 9. Failure to comply, without satisfactory excuse, with conditions of supervision.** Full revocation. Offenders on community supervision who are released by the Committee on Parole are much less likely to be returned to custody to serve the remainder of sentence.

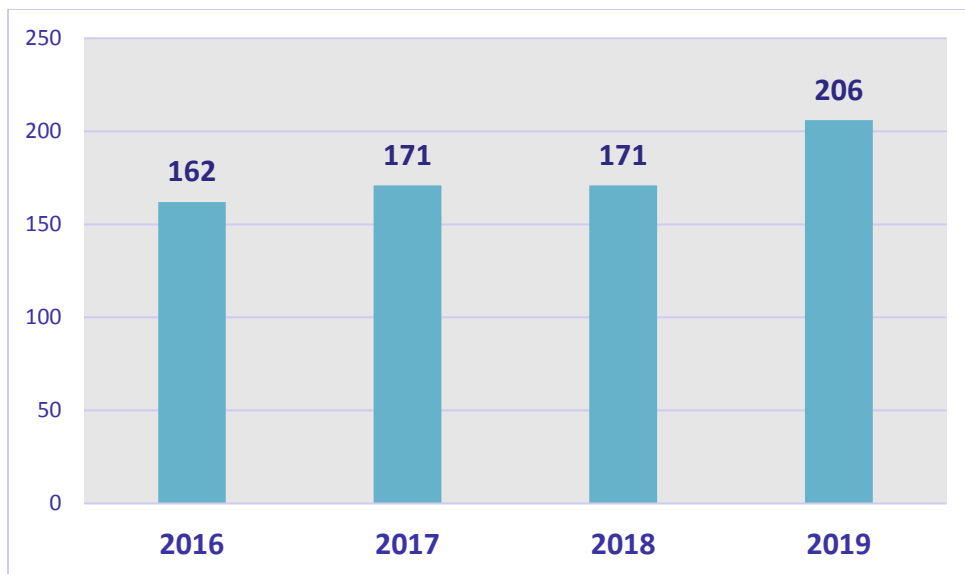
Other Actions (Performed by single member)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Revoked: Automatic/New felony conviction	703	756	840	1053	1187
Revoked: Offender waived revocation hearing	3984	3634	4028	3561	3360
Deferred Hearing-pending criminal charges	2284	2491	2,505	2468	2420
Unsatisfactory Termination of Supervision	934	1204	1280	1110	866
Warrants Issued	7886	8340	8247	6999	6354
Reprimands Issued	1221	1142	1220	1288	1179
Special Conditions modified	1164	1014	956	642	427
<b>Total Single Member Actions</b>	<b>19,055</b>	<b>19,820</b>	<b>20,248</b>	<b>17,902</b>	<b>16,700</b>

**Table 12. Single member actions.** Actions that do not require review by a parole panel for which a single member may act.

*“One thing I love about my job is being able to help people receive a second chance to better their lives.”* –Whitney Troxclair, Investigative Specialist



**Table 10. 1<sup>st</sup> technical violators by supervision type.** 1<sup>st</sup> technical violators are required to spend not more than 15 days in jail. The significant decrease since 2017 can be attributed to the Board’s use of alternatives to revocation (administrative sanctions).



**Table 11. 2<sup>nd</sup> or subsequent technical violations by fiscal year.** 2<sup>nd</sup> technical violators are required to spend not more than 30 days in jail, 3<sup>rd</sup> technical violators are required to spend not more than 30 days in jail, 4<sup>th</sup> or subsequent technical violators are required to spend not more than 90 days in jail.

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## 2019 Strategic Plan

All elements of the 2019 strategic plan point to the Board’s mission to promote public safety, address the needs of crime victims, and to facilitate successful reentry for offenders who have appropriately prepared. Progress made toward strategic plan goals is detailed below.

### Launch and grow our grant funded Louisiana Victim Outreach Program

One of the largest undertakings of 2019’s Strategic Plan was the establishment of the Louisiana Victim Outreach Program (**LaVO**). Through grant funding from the Louisiana Commission on Law Enforcement, the Board hired a Licensed Social Worker and a Program Consultant to begin providing victims and survivors of violent offenses



with resources to navigate the pardons and parole process. Through a compassionate response to victims’ needs, **LaVO** empowers victims and survivors through education; encourages healing through restorative programming; and grows a support system through statewide outreach.

Recognizing the emphasis the Board places on addressing the needs of crime victims, DOC Secretary Jimmy LeBlanc reorganized the Crime Victim Services Bureau (CVSB) so they can work more closely with the Board and its staff. The unit now reports to the Board’s Executive Director. A majority of the work done by the CVSB already revolved around the pardon and parole process. With the creation of **LaVO**, the merging of the entities and provision of services helps to ensure the needs of victims are being met.

Since the creation of **LaVO** in April 2019 and the re-organization of CVSB in October 2019, the Board’s team has made many strides to improve services to victims. The notification process has been streamlined enabling staff to focus efforts on victim registration. The pardon and parole processes contain many intricate details, which is why one of the **LaVO** grant objectives was to create a Victim Handbook. The goal of this handbook is to educate its readers on the processes and promote the use of healing resources.

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## **Expand Prescriptive Bundles and Special Conditions of Parole Releases**

Appropriately prescribing conditions can mean the difference in success and failure for offenders under the authority of the Committee on Parole. Many things must be considered when assigning these conditions, including but not limited to, the facility housed while incarcerated, the availability of resources in the area of residence post-release, and the basic needs of the offender.

### **Employment**

Employment is always an issue for offenders releasing back to the community. Increasing one's employability through vocational training can drastically increase an offender's chances of successful re-entry. While staff has searched ways to incorporate vocational training into the prescriptive bundles, it has been difficult to do so on a consistent basis. While exploring this topic, Investigative Specialist Ciara Marlow was selected to work with the Office of Adult Services on a new grant focused on employability, the Adult Reentry and Strategic Planning Program Grant (ARES). The purpose of the ARES Grant is to develop a comprehensive, collaborative, and multi-system strategic plan to increase public safety by reducing recidivism and improving the employability of people returning to their communities after incarceration. As co-chair and member of the planning team, Specialist Marlow traveled to select correctional facilities to meet with pertinent staff to discuss the facility's in-processing of offenders. The purpose of these meetings was to identify gaps in the system and to determine if/where new programming is needed. Specialist Marlow also meets with the inter-disciplinary working group, which advises on matters regarding the day-to-day activities of reentry and employment services in the correctional facility and in the community. As she continues to represent the Board in this endeavor, it is anticipated that effective strategies will be developed to address this critical issue.

### **Medical Assisted Treatment**

As medical advancements are made to address the issue of substance abuse, it is important that as an organization we embrace and utilize all tools available to us. We have focused a great deal of our efforts in 2019 on learning about medical assisted treatment and its uses when working with offenders who suffer from opioid use disorder. Through our collaborative efforts with the State Targeted Response to the Opioid Epidemic Program (STR), we have been able to add an opioid specific education program that is facilitated by peer support specialists to our list of pre-releases conditions. Participants are

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required to attend the intense educational portion of the program, and at the conclusion they are screened by medical staff and given the option to enroll in a medical assisted treatment plan. In 2019 the Board referred a total 43 offenders to the STR program and of those 14 received medical assisted treatment prior to release.

In addition to the STR program, the Board has continued to refer offenders to the Steve Hoyle Intense Substance Abuse Program (SHISAP). This program looks at the larger picture of addiction that participants are suffering from, not just one specific substance. They also have a mental health component, which if not addressed can lead to continued substance abuse.

### **Medical/Mental Health**

The Board's team of staffers has continued to screen offender records for indications of mental health contact prior to or while incarcerated. Staff are flagging this information so that parole panel members are aware of this history. Ultimately, the goal is to add conditions related to the offender's mental health care as a condition of parole to ensure continuity of services and/or treatment. In addition, as part of the Board's bi-annual training, Assistant Warden Kristen Thomas, M.A., has delivered training on mental health programming within the DPS&C. As the DPS&C transitions to the newly developed risk/needs/responsivity tool (a.k.a. "TIGER"), the Board has asked the DPS&C include (when available) the offender's mental health level of care as an indicator in the DOC risk assessment tool.

### **Continuous Training**

Board members are continuously updated on changes DOC makes to its line of certified treatment programs as well as educational offerings. The DOC Education Director has also delivered training to board members related to brain elasticity in aging offenders as well as offenders with learning disabilities.



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## **Increase data tracking of internal process to improve efficiency**

In an effort to streamline the parole process post-decision, Board staff developed a database to track offenders participating in programming prior to release as a condition of parole. This system has allowed for program participation monitoring, setting reminders to follow-up with institutional staff and tracking of estimated program completion dates. On average, offenders released 95 days after they received a favorable parole decision in 2016 & 2017. Since implementing this new system, that average time to release has been reduced to 68 days, which should result in savings for the DOC.

Within this Parole Decision Tracking System, a function was added that allows for tracking of offenders who were denied due to a lack of programming or some other factor but the Board requested their rehearing be expedited within a certain timeframe or upon completion of certain programs. This helps to ensure that if the offender completes the recommended or board ordered program, that case is returned for a parole hearing as soon as possible.

## **Increase stakeholder involvement in pre and post-release**

### **Teamwork**

2019 has continued the momentum of the previous year with a number of projects being initiated. As staff grew it was important to provide an environment conducive to productivity and encourage collaboration and team work. The DOC Facility Management team worked with Board management staff to design and create a custom work environment. Staff were able to customize their work areas to accommodate their duties. Anchoring this area is a multi-media conference space that staff are able to utilize. This has provided the ability to host outside organizations for meetings and collaborative discussion.

***“Everyday I get to do something that I love and make an impact on people’s lives.”*** –Elizabeth Traylor, Executive Management Officer

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### **Justice Accountability Center**

One effort to bring awareness to the public of the Board’s work and the important service provided to justice-involved individuals included the Justice and Accountability Center (JAC) in New Orleans. The JAC works to address issues in the post-conviction phase of the criminal justice system and creates a supportive, collaborative space for attorneys and advocates. The Board’s staff conducted a presentation at the JAC monthly clinic, providing information on how to seek a pardon. In preparation for this event, Board staff collaborated with the DOC Legal team and Probation & Parole Leadership to develop informative flyers on First Offender Pardons and the Pardon Process. These flyers included references to relevant legislation as well as frequently asked questions. The Board’s Executive Director gave a presentation on the pardon application process and Board staff answered questions from attendees. This collaboration will continue, as events for 2020 are already being scheduled.



### **Site visits**

Over the past year, Board members and staff have visited various state correctional facilities. Destinations have included David Wade Correctional Center (DWCC) in Homer, Dixon Correctional Center (DCI) in Jackson, Elayn Hunt Correctional Center (EHCC) in St. Gabriel, Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women (LCIW) at the Baker campuses, Louisiana State Penitentiary (LSP) at Angola, and Rayburn Correctional Center (RCC) in Angie.

### **Live hearings**

Parole hearings are primarily held by means of videoconference. The offender appears before the parole panel via videoconferencing from a prison facility, the location of which depends on the offender’s housing location at the time of the hearing. The parole panel is seated at DOC Headquarters in Baton Rouge. However, during this period, the Board conducted live



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on-site parole hearings at DWCC, DCI, EHCC, LCIW and LSP. At the conclusion of the hearings at DWCC and LSP, the presiding Board members and staff met with offenders to discuss the mission of the Board and future projects that concern the offender population. We also held live hearings at Southern University in Baton Rouge and at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. These events give law and criminal justice students an in-depth look at the Board's processes as well as the focus on providing offenders with rehabilitative programming.

### **Veterans Special Needs**

The number of incarcerated veterans continues to grow as the stresses of war manifest in issues with substance abuse and mental health disorders such as Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Recognizing this as an emerging issue, the Board staff was able to find multiple opportunities to gain valuable knowledge on this topic. First, Committee on Parole member Brennan Kelsey and Executive Director Francis Abbott

attended the Annual Veterans Summit at Rayburn Correctional Center (RCC). This event brings together incarcerated veterans and veteran assistance organizations in an effort to bring awareness to issues affecting incarcerated veterans. Speakers included the members of the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs and various elected officials from the Florida Parishes and New Orleans. In addition to the event at RCC, the Board's Administrative



Program Director, John Poche', arranged for multiple Board staff to tour the veteran's dormitory at Elayn Hunt Correctional Center (EHCC) in St. Gabriel. This housing unit is a structured environment in which the veterans housed there hold each other to an even higher standard than the prison facility. The veterans hold counseling sessions focused on assisting each other to cope with their shared life experiences. EHCC invites the Board and its staff to the prison to speak to the offender students of the pre-release class to discuss their transition from incarceration to community supervision. In addition to these opportunities, EHCC hosts an Annual Empowerment Summit aimed at educating the incarcerated individuals on relevant topics. At this 2019 summit, Chairman Ranatza was asked to speak and cover the subject of Justice Reinvestment and multiple endeavors the Board is undertaking to continue to grow in its mission.



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## Crime Victim Awareness

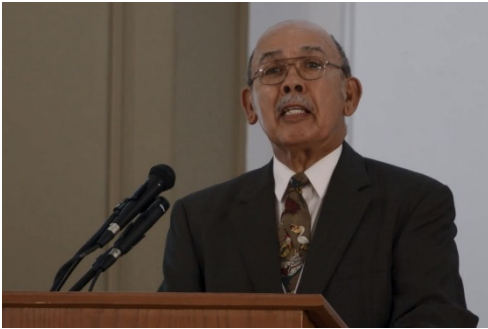
In conjunction with Crime Victims Awareness Week, the Board and its staff were able to assemble three different events around the state. The first event was at Louisiana State Penitentiary and included guest speakers; Eva Lessinger of the New Orleans Family Justice Center, Tamara Jackson of Silence is Violence, Executive Director Abbott and Chairman Ranatza. Next, the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women hosted the Board's staff as Chairman Ranatza and Executive Director Abbott discussed the topic of trauma informed decision-making and the incorporation of this topic into the Board's hearing and decision processes. Lastly, staff worked with the Crime Victims Service Bureau to host speakers at DOC Headquarters in Baton Rouge to continue to bring awareness to the Department's headquarters staff and the public of the need to address the needs of victims and survivors of crime.



During this period the DOC Crime Victims Services Bureau Director (CVSB) sought technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime (OVC) for the provision of training related to the implementation of an appropriate victim awareness training curriculum for offenders. The OVC provided Louisiana with a subject matter expert who conducted a two-day site visit. During the site-visit, focus groups comprised of a broad spectrum of stakeholders -- victims, criminal justice stakeholders, and other criminal justice organizations -- examined victim issues through a broader lens than their everyday work. During this process "*Victim Impact: Listen and Learn*", a series of videos was identified as a curriculum to offer to Louisiana's offender population. The program helps offenders become aware of the impact of their crime on victims and to take responsibility for their actions. The Board and CVSB will work with DOC to develop an implementation plan to rollout this program.

The OVC consultant's findings during the site visit and recommendations are forthcoming. Any recommendations will be incorporated in the board's 2020 strategic goals.

## Educating the Public

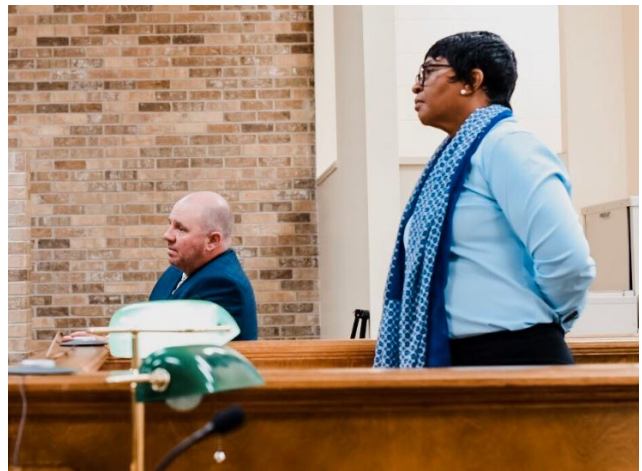


At every event that includes incarcerated individuals, criminal justice agencies, justice involved organizations, the Board, and its staff make themselves available to the attendees to provide and answer questions. These opportunities provide valuable information to continue to develop the Board’s mission and educate the public about the Board’s

considerable responsibilities in the criminal justice system.

## Professional Development

As a Board, professional development and networking with other criminal justice professionals is pivotal to increasing the knowledge base of board members and staff members. Multiple members of the Board participated in the Association of Paroling Authorities International Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. This organization provides training specific to parole matters and is a resource for polling and data research. Several executive staff attended the Louisiana Correctional Association Training Conference in Lake Charles. Executive Director Abbott presented information during the opening ceremony on the state of the Board and current projects. While attending, staff were able to



gain training on the newly implemented State Targeted Response Program (STR) program for opioid use disorder, Victim Offender Dialogue, Criminal Justice Reform, and several other relevant areas, which they were able to bring back and share with staff and board members.

***“Our work is interesting and effects people in all aspects of criminal justice.”*** –Theresa Doan, Investigative Specialist



Following Executive Director Abbott’s presentation at the initial Rural Criminal Justice Summit in 2018, he was invited to participate on the planning committee for the 2019 summit. The 2019 summit occurred on the campus of Southern Methodist University at the Dedman School of Law in Houston, Texas. The discussions centered around ways to address issues of affecting justice-involved individuals in rural communities. Mr. Abbott’s (pictured right) participation in the event

provided an opportunity to extend invitations to organizations in Louisiana to participate the in summit. These invitations resulted in the participation of Natchitoches Parish District Attorney Billy Joe Harrington (pictured center) and Re-Entry Court Judge from the 22<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District, William Knight (pictured left), participated as one of the presenters.

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## 2020 Strategic Plan

As we prepare for the challenges of 2020, it is important to build upon lessons learned in previous years. As we learn more about the needs of the populations we serve, we can begin to focus our efforts on addressing these issues. The board's strategic goals for 2020:

- **Continue to expand and improve grant funded Louisiana Victim Outreach Program and Crime Victim Services Bureau.**
  - Implement findings from the 2019 technical assistance provided by the Office of Victims of Crime
  - Continue staff training and development of a victim-focused staff
  - Improve victim notification processes
- **Expand training opportunities for staff**
  - Community supervision and Training Academy site visits
  - Correctional facility site visits
- **Develop process to evaluate new data tracking systems**
  - Prescriptive bundles
  - Special conditions of parole releases
  - Parole decision tracking
  - Denial referral system
- **Increase stakeholder involvement in pre and post-release**
  - Community outreach
  - Strategic collaborations
    - Inter-Departmental
    - Non-profits
    - Professional organizations
    - Legislative committees

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## 2020 Legislative Suggestions

The Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole is one of only a handful of paroling authorities to have achieved accreditation by the American Correctional Association. Accreditation assures the public that competent professionals administer parole in Louisiana and that the work of the Board and its staff meets or exceeds professional standards of quality. There are three legislative proposals that would improve the Board's compliance with professional standards set by the American Correctional Association (ACA) and enhance the work of the board.

### **To require that tenure of Board of Pardons members is no less than 4 years; to provide for the removal of Board of Pardons members for good and demonstrated cause.**

The ACA Standards for Adult Paroling Authorities, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition requires that "If a fixed term of office is used in the appointment of authority members, the terms of the members are staggered" and "...Legal provision allows for the removal of parole authority members for good and demonstrated cause only after a full and open hearing..."

The Board is out of compliance with the ACA standard referenced above. While the Pardon Board members serve at the pleasure of the Governor, it is important that terms of appointment provide stability of membership and reappointment should not be considered automatic.

According to the American Correctional Association's Standards for Adult Paroling Authorities, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition:

Continuity of policy is an important goal for a correctional system which seeks equity and efficiency. Static policy is not the general goal. Change should be ... ongoing...; however, if it is to occur it should be .... with due regard for previous organizational history. Abrupt alterations of program which fail to consider prior efforts almost inevitably produce unwarranted disparities in decision and make stable program development ... difficult. In a key correctional unit, such as the parole authority, continuity of policy is a necessity and staggered terms of appointment are one important means of achieving it.

To accomplish staggered terms requires a constitutional amendment, Article IV, Section (E).

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## **To provide for adherence to accreditation standards regarding compensation of parole authority decision makers.**

The decision-making authority of parole authority members is comparable to that of judges of courts having trial jurisdiction. The level of compensation can help attract persons with the required skills and experience to serve on parole boards.

According to the 2017 Judicial Salary Tracker published by the National Center for State Courts, the salary for an associate judge of general jurisdiction trial courts (actual salary and cost-of-living adjusted salary as of January 1, 2018) was \$151,579. Law requires that membership on the Louisiana Board of Pardons and Committee on Parole is a full-time commitment. The salaries of members are established in R.S. 15:574.2.

In 2016, the Association of Paroling Authorities International conducted an informal survey of its members regarding salary of parole decision makers. When compared to the salaries of the Southern Legislative Conference (SLC) states, Louisiana's parole decision makers are the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest paid. Also, when compared to the SLC paroling authorities who are ACA accredited, Louisiana's monthly case decision are the highest.

## **Availability of medical and mental health information at parole hearings**

An offender's medical and mental health is an important aspect of successful reentry. This information is not routinely provided to the Board in a structured format from professionals at the housing facility. *LARS 15:574.3* currently requires this information be provided to the Pardon Board for pardon consideration hearings but not to the Committee on Parole for parole consideration hearings.

The offender's housing institution currently provides information concerning the offender's institutional adjustment, disciplinary behavior, programs of completion, etc. The routine availability of key information concerning the offender's medical and mental health status will assist the Board in making the best possible decision as it relates to the release of an offender on parole. If granted parole, the parole panel could order special conditions for continuity of care as a special condition of supervision. The Board seeks a brief assessment provided by the appropriate medical and mental health professional. This assessment should be submitted to the Board at the same time as the institutional progress report.





**Contact:**

**Francis M. Abbott, Executive Director**

**(225) 342-6622**

**[francis.abbott@la.gov](mailto:francis.abbott@la.gov)**

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**Louisiana Board of Pardons & Parole**

**P.O. Box 94304**

**Baton Rouge, LA 70804**

**(225) 342-6622**

**[doc.louisiana.gov/louisiana-board-of-pardons-and-parole/](http://doc.louisiana.gov/louisiana-board-of-pardons-and-parole/)**