



OUR BROKEN PAROLE SYSTEM

WISDOM receives hundreds of letters from inmates who are stuck in prison because of a broken parole system. As of December, 2013, more than 2,800 people in Wisconsin prisons were eligible for parole. That number has not changed drastically: a few have been released, and a few become parole-eligible each year.

- Parole-eligible, Old Law Inmates were convicted of crimes committed before Truth in Sentencing was enacted in 1999. They were sentenced under the “old law.”
- Old law inmates were given longer sentences by Wisconsin judges with the understanding that they would likely be paroled after 25% of their overall sentence had been served if they completed their programs and were deemed rehabilitated.
- The average cost to taxpayers for a Wisconsin prison inmate is about \$50,000 per year. The average cost for an inmate over age 55 is over \$100,000/year. The average cost to a family whose loved one is incarcerated is immeasurable.
- There is no standard definition for the term, “insufficient time served.”

Not all parole-eligible inmates are ready to be released. But, many, many of them are. Here are examples of their stories. You can read some of the entire letters on our website, www.prayforjusticeinwi.org. You can also sign up there to work on our campaign.

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM INMATES

1. I'm 58 years old serving life plus 20 years for murder and robbery...
Looking back I don't like the person I was either, though since my incarceration I've done a lot of soul searching, attending self-help groups and educating myself to be a better man I can look at and be proud of even if no one else can...
2. I was convicted of first-degree murder, arson, false insurance claim, threat to injure and false imprisonment in 1983. I was 27 years old and I am now 59. When I was convicted the average length of incarceration for a lifer was 13-15 years. I have now doubled that length. I have had 10 parole hearings and have been denied each time for the same two reasons: not sufficient time served and unreasonable risk to society. Both of my co-defendants, who were convicted of the same crimes, have been out for many, many years. I have done all my programs, and two vocational programs and worked many jobs to assure a smooth transition back to society. I would like to be released before my parents pass away and help them to remain in their home as long as possible. I plan to become a solid citizen and a productive member of the community.
3. I'm serving a term of life imprisonment. I've been in custody for 46 years. I was sentenced under the old, old law (1969-70). Under the law I was convicted, I was eligible for parole after serving a minimum of 11 years and 3 months. I've been going before the Parole Board ever since... I'm a Vietnam Vet. When I joined the military I had a clean record. I have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder... I joined the service with less than 8th grade education. I acquired my education during my incarceration. I am now a certified legal assistant. I have 29 college credits through the UW system, and have published a book...

4. In 1995 I pled no contest to 1st Degree Intentional Homicide in the death of my friend who was having an affair with my wife. At my sentencing, based on my history and the circumstances surrounding my offence, the judge agreed to allow me to become eligible for release at my first parole opportunity. I have been eligible for release for almost nine years... I have appeared before a Parole Commissioner ten times and been denied parole each time because of “insufficient time for punishment”...
5. As a 16 year old youth I was convicted of first degree reckless homicide (party to a crime) and two counts of conduct regardless of life. I received a sentence of 30 years confinement. I became eligible for parole in 2005 and have come before the Parole Board seven times. Each time I was denied on the grounds of “unreasonable risk to the public” and that I “have not served sufficient time.” ...I truly realize my mistakes and am only seeking an opportunity to be a good husband, father, and peer/mentor.
6. I was 18 years old when I committed my crime of reckless injury. I am now 42 years old, a grandfather of a three year old, and father of a 24 year old with whom I have a great relationship... I first became eligible for parole in 2004 and have been denied seven times with the same blanket statement, “Release at this time would create a risk to the public”. I have completed every program asked of me, maintained a job throughout my incarceration and have a clean record for all of my time of incarceration.

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS FROM INMATES

7. I was convicted of 1st degree reckless homicide and reckless endangerment while armed. I was 19 years old. Prior to coming to prison I had no education, little work experience and no trade. In my 21 years here I continue to do those things and more. I have completed well over the committee's recommended programs. I have been to parole three times and am told, "You are doing very well"... but insufficient time.

8. I was convicted of 1st degree reckless homicide and sentenced to 40 years. I became eligible for parole in 2004. I have been to parole hearings six times and always told I have a very good prison conduct record... but if parole were granted it would depreciate the severity of the crime, so not enough time served.

9. I was charged with 1st degree intentional homicide and armed robbery. I was 14 years old and waived into adult court. I am now 42 years old. Mentally and spiritually I am light years ahead of the kid who began this life sentence. When I was sentenced to life the average time a lifer spent in prison was 17.6 years according to the agent who conducted the pre-sentence investigation for the court. I have served 28 years as of October 1, 2015. I have appeared before the parole board 2 times; both times denied for not enough time served. My only care is to survive prison long enough to eventually get paroled.

10. I received a 40-year sentence for 1st degree reckless homicide. I've served 21 years of that sentence and seen the parole board 9 times. Each time I was denied for insufficient time for the crime. I have completed all of my pre-release modules. In 2008 the daughter of the victim of my car accident, herself a victim wrote the Parole Board and said I'd done enough time and should go home. At the same time the wife of the victim, also a victim, wrote and said she had no problem if Parole released me... I've given up writing to Parole...
11. During my time in prison I have learned from my mistakes. I have undergone changes through extensive drug treatment programs, counseling, and the restorative justice program. I have grown to an individual who is moving forward to be a productive, law-abiding citizen. I have taken back the control of my life with the help of God. I have been to the parole board 13 times. Going to parole hearings has become extremely depressing, mentally stressful and very discouraging.
12. I'm writing on behalf of my son, incarcerated since the tender age of 15. He committed a crime with a gun but no one was seriously injured and there was no serious property damage. He received a 40-year sentence. My son has been in front of the Parole Board 8 times... Representatives of the Placement Committee made it clear no matter how many times he goes before the Board he will not be released until 2024...



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