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SENATE BILL NO. 1125

Senate Amendments in [ ] - January 29, 2021

A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 53.1-136 and 53.1-155 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Parole Board; notice to victim.

Patrons Prior to Engrossment—Senators Obenshain, DeSteph, Newman and Suetterlein; Delegate: Cole, M.L.

Referred to Committee on Rehabilitation and Social Services

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That §§ 53.1-136 and 53.1-155 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows: § 53.1-136. Powers and duties of Board; notice of release of certain inmates.

In addition to the other powers and duties imposed upon the Board by this article, the Board shall:

1. Adopt, subject to approval by the Governor, general rules governing the granting of parole and eligibility requirements, which shall be published and posted for public review;

2. Adopt, subject to approval by the Governor, rules providing for the granting of parole to those prisoners who are eligible for parole pursuant to § 53.1-165.1 on the basis of demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation and the lesser culpability of juvenile offenders;

3. a. Release on parole for such time and upon such terms and conditions as the Board shall prescribe, persons convicted of felonies and confined under the laws of the Commonwealth in any correctional facility in Virginia when those persons become eligible and are found suitable for parole, according to those rules adopted pursuant to subdivisions 1 and 2;

b. Establish the conditions of postrelease supervision authorized pursuant to § 18.2-10 and subsection A of § 19.2-295.2;

c. Notify by certified mail at least 21 business days prior to release on discretionary parole of any inmate convicted of a felony and sentenced to a term of 10 or more years, the attorney for the Commonwealth in the jurisdiction where the inmate was sentenced. In the case of parole granted for medical reasons, where death is imminent, the attorney for the Commonwealth may be notified by telephone or other electronic means prior to release. Nothing in this section shall be construed to alter the obligations of the Board under § 53.1-155 for investigation prior to release;

d. Within seven days of making any decision regarding the parole of a prisoner, provide written or electronic notice of such decision to the victim of the crime for which the prisoner was incarcerated, unless the victim has submitted a written request to the Board to forgo such notice [ . Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to delay the date upon which a prisoner is scheduled to be released on parole ] ;

e. Provide that in any case where a person who is released on parole or postrelease supervision has been committed to the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services under the provisions of Chapter 9 (§ 37.2-900 et seq.) of Title 37.2 the conditions of his parole or postrelease supervision shall include the requirement that the person comply with all conditions given him by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and that he follow all of the terms of his treatment plan;

4. Revoke parole and any period of postrelease and order the reincarceration of any parolee or felon serving a period of postrelease supervision or impose a condition of participation in any component of the Statewide Community-Based Corrections System for State-Responsible Offenders (§ 53.1-67.2 et seq.) on any eligible parolee, when, in the judgment of the Board, he has violated the conditions of his parole or postrelease supervision or is otherwise unfit to be on parole or on postrelease supervision;

5. Issue final discharges to persons released by the Board on parole when the Board is of the opinion that the discharge of the parolee will not be incompatible with the welfare of such person or of society;

6. Make investigations and reports with respect to any commutation of sentence, pardon, reprieve or remission of fine, or penalty when requested by the Governor;

7. Publish monthly a statement regarding the action taken by the Board on the parole of prisoners. The statement shall list the name of each prisoner considered for parole and indicate whether parole was granted or denied, as well as the basis for denial of parole as described in subdivision 3 a; and

8. Ensure that each person eligible for parole receives a timely and thorough review of his suitability for release on parole, including a review of any relevant post-sentencing information. If parole is denied, the basis for the denial of parole shall be in writing and shall give specific reasons for such denial to such inmate.

[ For the purposes of this section, "victim" means the same as that term is defined in § 19.2-11.01. ]

ENGROSSED

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**§ 53.1-155. Investigation prior to release; transition assistance.**

A. No person shall be released on parole by the Board until a thorough investigation has been made into the prisoner's history, physical and mental condition and character and his conduct, employment and attitude while in prison. The Board shall also determine that his release on parole will not be incompatible with the interests of society or of the prisoner. The provisions of this section shall not be applicable to persons released on parole pursuant to § 53.1-159.

B. An investigation conducted pursuant to this section shall include notification that a victim may submit to the Virginia Parole Board evidence concerning the impact that the release of the prisoner will have on such victim. This notification shall be sent to the last address provided to the Board by any victim of a crime for which the prisoner was incarcerated. The Board shall endeavor diligently to contact the victim prior to making any decision to release any inmate on discretionary parole. The victim of a crime for which the prisoner is incarcerated may present to the Board oral or written testimony concerning the impact that the release of the prisoner will have on the victim, and the Board shall consider such testimony in its review. Once testimony is submitted by a victim, such testimony shall remain in the prisoner's parole file and shall be considered by the Board at every parole review. *The Board shall provide notice to the victim of a crime for which the prisoner is incarcerated of all decisions made by the Board regarding parole for the prisoner unless requested otherwise pursuant to § 53.1-136. The victim may submit a written request to the Board to also be notified of (i) the prisoner's parole eligibility date and mandatory release date as determined by the Department of Corrections, and (ii) any parole-related interview dates, and (iii) the Board's decision regarding parole for the prisoner.* The victim may request that the Board only notify the victim if, following its review, the Board is inclined to grant parole to the prisoner, in which case the victim shall have ~~forty-five~~ 45 days to present written or oral testimony for the Board's consideration. If the victim has requested to be notified only if the Board is inclined to grant parole and no testimony, either written or oral, is received from the victim within at least ~~forty-five~~ 45 days of the date of the Board's notification, the Board shall render its decision based on information available to it in accordance with subsection A. The definition of victim in § 19.2-11.01 shall apply to this section.

Although any information presented by the victim of a crime for which the prisoner is incarcerated shall be retained in the prisoner's parole file and considered by the Board, such information shall not infringe on the Board's authority to exercise its decision-making authority.

C. Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection A, if a physical or mental examination of a prisoner eligible for parole has been conducted within the last ~~twelve~~ 12 months, and the prisoner has not required medical or psychiatric treatment within a like period while incarcerated, the prisoner may be released on parole by the Parole Board directly from a local correctional facility.

The Department shall offer each prisoner to be released on parole or under mandatory release who has been sentenced to serve a term of imprisonment of at least three years the opportunity to participate in a transition program within six months of such prisoner's projected or mandatory release date. The program shall include advice for job training opportunities, recommendations for living a law-abiding life, and financial literacy information. The Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security shall prescribe guidelines to govern these programs.