

Nevada Parole Board Meeting Notes

Background. The Nevada Parole Board meetings are open to the public. The reason for my visit was requested by the 2 Commissioners in attendance at the hearing. The reason given was to assist inmates with preparation for their parole hearing. These observations are considered typical, since all nine parole hearings that afternoon were similar in format and administration. These notes are not to be considered complete and representative of all issues that can be raised, they are meant to help the process and ultimately the inmate to keep from returning to prison.

Process. Two hearing Commissioners are in attendance in matters other than the most serious crimes, like murder. For those crimes, three Commissioners are in attendance. The Commissioners in attendance make recommendations to the full Board, which in turn makes the final ruling on the case. The hearings are conducted via closed circuit TV, with Commissioners in attendance in Parole Board Offices, located in the Carson City area and Las Vegas area, with the inmates in attendance from their individual institutions. There are a total of 7 commissioners including the chair, 3 in the Las Vegas area, and 4 in the Carson City area.

Meeting. Inmates are greeted, and asked to verify their signature on a document that was presented to the Board, namely, the notice of hearing. It states the date and time of the hearing, and lists certain rights the offender has in regards to the scheduled hearing. A risk assessment, an instrument that chronicles their arrest record and convictions, with a score is also part of the information given to the Parole Commissioners. This document includes crimes committed prior to an inmate's 18th birthday. One inmate acknowledged that he was first arrested when he was 13 years old. The Commissioners go over the issues identified on the Risk Assessment and ask questions related to it. This is a critically important document. The Commissioners will go over it with the inmate to validate its accuracy. Listen carefully and make sure it is accurate. The inmate is then asked if they wish to make an opening statement.

Opportunity. This is a critical. Your opening statement is an opportunity, in a succinct and summary manner, to make your case, acknowledge past mistakes, identify what you learned from them, how you have taken advantage of educational opportunities afforded you during your incarceration, without write-ups, if possible.

Also, refer them to documents in your packet that: 1. identify your life goals and the objectives to attain them, 2. present them with a work resume, identifying your talents, skills and abilities, and 3. a step-by-step plan of what you intend to do upon leaving the institution. This later plan can be developed using the "who, what, when, where, why" approach to your intentions upon release. Make sure you have kept your write-ups to an absolute minimum, none would be the target. Make sure these documents are part of the packet of information given to the Parole Board.

Questions and Issues. The Commissioners will then ask you questions associated with your record and how you intend to conduct yourself in the future. Questions could include, "Why did you commit the offense?" Responses would best be thought out, accurate, and having had time to consider them and their consequences to others, and "I am truly sorry for what I have put my victim through, and I acknowledge their long suffering and lingering effects." Gang affiliation will be brought up, together with your employment record in the year prior to your crime(s). Anger management, victim empathy, how you intend to break the cycle and how you intend to will keep away from bad company. The Commissioners pointed out that if you have a number of felony convictions, if there is a next felony, the judge could target you as a habitual offender, with significant and dire consequences. You

will be graded on the risk assessment with a point system, work hard at the time it is prepared to keep the score as low as possible. After the hearing, deliberation by the Board was confidential, so important information was left out of what can be reported herein.

Suffice to say, before the hearing ended, the inmate was given another opportunity to make a statement. This opportunity should not be missed. Have a statement prepared. Thank them for their time, acknowledge they have an important decision to make, and if they decide in your favor, you have not only every intention not to reoffend, but to make something of your life by finding a job that uses all of the talents, skills and abilities that you have to offer, recognizing that you may have to start in a less than ideal situation in order to work your way up, with education, the support of family and dedication to becoming a productive member of your community and society.

Rules of the Road. When you come to the Parole Board meeting, treat it as a job interview. Identify what you have to offer, and give the Board a level of comfort about your ability and dedication to making your life better, and how you intend to do it. Acknowledge your mistakes and characterize them as significant and a life long learning experience. Show maturity, honesty, and make it easy for them to say YES!

Observing some of the inmates behavior was shocking. Answers to questions from the Board were a mumbled, yea. . . If you treat others, especially the board members, with dignity and respect, you will get it back. Know their names, address them as Commissioner _____. Sit up straight, look them in the eye, come with prepared statements, both opening and closing along with copies of your Goals and Objectives, resume, and a plan for your future, and ask them if they have any questions about those documents. Take a couple of seconds to organize your thoughts prior to responding to their questions. Give a careful, measured and clear response to the question asked. IF necessary, ask them to repeat the question, and answer THAT question to the very best of your ability.

Major Issues: There are two major issues for Parole Board Members.

First and foremost, protection of the public and society as a whole is considered paramount. You have to address this and be convincing why and what you intend to do when released is going to work, especially if there is a history of recidivism. Tell them why it is going to be different this time.

Second, know that how you present yourself and what you say matters. Parole will be granted if there is a reasonable likelihood that you will be successful post incarceration. They will listen carefully to your answers to their questions, sometimes tough questions.

For example, how do you intend to keep off drugs? What are you addicted to? Why did you commit the crime? Practice the answers, get your goals/objectives, resume and plan for after you leave completed in the very best manner. Get help developing these. Practice, out loud, the answers to questions you can anticipate. Preparation will give you confidence. Do your best, you can do no more. Do not accept less than your best effort from yourself for yourself. Thank them for their efforts on your behalf.