

Writing Letters of Support to the Parole Board

You can submit letters of support to the Michigan Parole Board attesting to your loved one's (your LO) character and, most importantly, their reform and plans to improve his or her life. Well-written letters can make a real difference in how the Parole Board sees your LO as a person, not just an inmate or a criminal. It also helps them understand what your LO can expect if they were to be released which can serve to alleviate some of their own worries about the future of their decisions. Especially because of the importance, some folks wrestle with what to say and how to say it. This guide is not legal advice but is intended to give you some direction and help in crafting the most effective letter possible.

WHAT DO I WRITE ABOUT?

Character letters can address any/all of the positive changes you've seen during your LO's time of incarceration. What is even more effective, however, are letters outlining what kind of support you are willing to provide your LO upon release. Also, help your LO (if you can) in getting support. More support and more letters from the biggest number of people possible demonstrates a strong support network which is a very important consideration for release. Tone is also essential. It is very important not to explain or risk minimizing their crime. Don't say "it was just a really bad decision" or "it was an accident" or "that's not like them at all." It is much better instead to discuss how your LO has accepted responsibility and shown remorse for their actions, and how they're putting in the necessary effort to move on productively.

WHAT DO I DO WITH THE LETTER?

You will send your letter to the Parole Board ahead of your LO's interview or hearing and provide your LO a copy as well in case it doesn't get filed in time or gets misplaced. The address is on the next page/sample letter.

GENERAL TIPS

Be professional. This letter will be put in your LO's file and could potentially have a big impact on their future. Use appropriate language and proper grammar, avoid typos and poor spelling. Letters should be typed or printed on plain white paper with your signature at the end. Include your return address on the envelope as well.

Take the time to write a first draft and work on revising it a couple of times. Use your first attempt to work out the kinks. Think about what you want to accomplish with your letter and how and just get it down on paper. Then proof-read it and fine-tune it to make it the best it can be. Remember, the goal of your letter is to convince the parole board of your LO's ability to be successful returning home. Help them to see how you will support them in doing so.

The internet is your friend. There are a lot of crazy things on the internet, but it can also provide a lot of good information if you know what you're looking for and how to find it. If you have access to a computer (your local public library can help you with this), type "How to write a good parole board letter of support" into your search bar. You will find all kinds of examples to draw from. You'll see things from other states, but that's okay. You can find samples of how other people have worded their letters which can be really helpful if you're not great with crafting your own – not all of us find that easy to do.

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for Prisoners**
Action with Compassion

Humanity for Prisoners seeks to provide personalized, problem-solving services for inmates and their loved ones who don't know where to turn. If you found this guide helpful, please consider donating. And if you would like any additional support, do not hesitate to ask us. We're here to help.

Letter formatting sample and considerations

Month Day, Year

Your First Middle Last Name

Address

City, State zip code

RE: Your loved one's name and inmate #

Michigan Department of Corrections

Office of the Parole Board

PO Box 30003

Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Members of the Parole Board,

Paragraph 1 - Get directly to the point. Generally, try not to waste time on sentences that don't matter – such as “I know you are busy...” or “I'm sure you get a lot of letters...” That's their job and there's no reason in stating the obvious. Just politely get to the point. A good first paragraph is short and sweet: *My name is xxx. I am writing this letter in support of [your LO's name] who will be eligible for parole in [month year].*

Paragraph 2 – Explain who you are and how you know your LO. Ex: *I am [LO's name] brother/best-friend/former-employee/daughter/father/we worked together/etc..* You may include how long you have known your LO, how you came to know them (if not family), and what your relationship is like. How often do you communicate? Visit? Show the Parole Board you really know this person. Ex: *We worked closely together for three years at X Co. or our kids were best friends and we shared carpool throughout their grade school years.* Your goal should be to demonstrate that you know the person well. Also share a bit about who you are including what you do and possible community affiliations you may have.

Paragraph 3 – Explain what you are offering. Be specific about the nature of your support you are providing now as well as what you plan to provide. It could be anything from spiritual or emotional support to meals or networking for jobs, a place to live or transportation. We know that being "real" about this support provides the letter maximum credibility. This means that the support you offer may have conditions in the spirit of accountability, guidance, and love. Here are a few brief examples of conditional support: *I'll provide emotional support for Joe when he asks for it and will offer it if I see him in need.* Or *I'll use my network of professional contacts to help Joe get a job as long as he makes himself available for interviews and job coaching.* Or *I'll give Joe a room in my home at [address] for up to [some finite period of time] while he finds his own place. We have agreed he will contribute to the household chores and maintenance until he can begin paying rent in his own place.*

Paragraph 4 - Wrap up your letter. You may want to simply and briefly reinforce what you've already shared and why you believe in your LO. You may end with something like: *I believe beyond a doubt that given the opportunity of parole, Joe will come home and make us all proud.* You will find your own words here as you speak from your heart and your own authentic place. Add: *Thank you for your time and attention.*

Respectfully,

(Hit return 4 times and sign your name in this empty space, above your typed name.)

Type Your Name