

## National Crime Victims' Rights Week 2015 Engaging Communities, Empowering Victims

*Angie McCown, Director  
TDCJ Victim Services Division*

I hope everyone's 2015 is off to a great start. In April we will once again commemorate National Crime Victims' Rights Week (NCVRW). This year's theme "Engaging Communities, Empowering Victims" offers each of us the opportunity to examine what we as Texas citizens and criminal justice professionals are doing to support victims. As Joye E. Frost, Director of the Department of Justice Office for Victims of Crime, stated in the resource guide for 2015 NCVRW:

We know that in order to help victims become survivors, we must first listen and learn in an effort to better understand what they need and how we can best serve them. By working with community leaders and organizations, we can leverage existing community resources to understand the needs of underserved victims and

the impact of victimization. Engaging the entire community will enable us to reach more victims and expand their options for services.

As many of you know the Texas Legislature convened the 84th Session on January 13, 2015, and the regular session will end on June 1, 2015. During this time many victims and victims' advocates will engage members of the Senate and the House of Representatives to discuss public policy to expand victims' rights and enhance service to victims of crime, with the goal of victim empowerment in the criminal justice system. Participating in the legislative process is one way to "engage communities and empower victims." The Texas Legislature Online website [www.legis.state.tx.us](http://www.legis.state.tx.us) is a tool that anyone can use to follow bills that are filed and to receive alerts about bills that may impact victims.



*Angie McCown*

I encourage everyone reading *The Victim's Informer* to think creatively about how you might engage your community to better support victims, and to join your community in commemorating NCVRW April 19-25, 2015.

For more information on NCVRW, please see page 3 of this edition of *The Victim's Informer*. ★

## TBCJ MEMBER JANICE HARRIS LORD

by *Oliver J. Bell, Chairman*  
*Texas Board of Criminal Justice*

This year National Crime Victims' Rights Week is April 19-25. It is celebrated throughout the country to promote victims' rights and honor crime victims and those who advocate on their behalf. Janice Harris Lord is one of those exceptional victim's rights advocates.

In 2007, former Governor Rick Perry appointed Janice Harris Lord of Arlington to serve on the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ). While serving as a TBCJ member, Ms. Lord's primary focus has been victim services, rehabilitation programs, health care and the Windham School District (WSD).

Ms. Lord chairs the Victim Services Committee and is a member of both the Human Resources and the Rehabilitation and Reentry Programs committees. She has authored many journal articles, curricula, brochures, booklets and research reports, and serves as consultant for a variety of crime victim organizations with an emphasis on caregiver resilience, trauma, grief and the role of spirituality in human services. Working with the Victim Services Division, she hosted several webinars

that have reached out to victim advocates throughout Texas, with the next scheduled webinar to be held on March 12, 2015.

*She is a true ally to crime victims and the systems, processes and procedures that help them recover and re-engage in their communities.*

Ms. Lord has often met with the director of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division on subjects which affect crime victims, and has written a column for *The Victim's Informer*, covering evidence-based practices. Working with Rehabilitation Programs Division and Reentry and Integration Division staff, she has helped enhance offender evaluation for those participating in TDCJ rehabilitation programs. Ms. Lord has also had discussions with board members and chaplaincy staff to find ways to improve the evaluation of chaplaincy services and train chaplains in victim sensitivity as well as criminogenic behavior of offenders. This training is currently being implemented.

To help ensure the quality of offender health care, Ms. Lord meets regularly with the Health Services Division Director on medical cases, particularly in the women's units. She has attended all Dallas meetings

*The Texas Department of Criminal Justice Victim Services Division is proud to provide you with an email notification service. Email notifications may be retrieved directly from your computer, mobile device, or wherever internet access is available. Email notifications are time sensitive and notify you of changes in an offender's status. Being a current Victim Notification System registrant will not automatically register you for this email service. To register, contact the Victim Services Division at 800-848-4284 or visit our website at [www.tdcj.texas.gov](http://www.tdcj.texas.gov) and complete the victim email notification form. You continue to have the option to receive notifications by letter, email, or both. We would like to encourage all victim service providers who utilize the Victim Notification System to elect to receive email notifications only whenever possible.*

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## TBCJ MEMBER JANICE HARRIS LORD

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of the Correctional Managed Health Care Committee on behalf of the board.

Ms. Lord served on the WSD Education Committee and has reviewed the challenges encountered and successes achieved by the district. She also served on the selection committee for a superintendent of the school system. As a representative of the board, she attended a two-day strategic planning meeting of Windham staff, and also attended meetings called by the district superintendent, Dr. Clint Carpenter, to evaluate the progress of his first year and to review the WSD's annual report.

Janice Harris Lord has proven herself a dedicated public servant, motivated by compassion and positive energy, whose work helps make Texas a great place to live. She is a true ally to crime victims and the systems, processes and procedures that help them recover and re-engage in their communities. ★

## OFFENDER REENTRY: THE VALUE OF VICTIM INVOLVEMENT

by Mark Odom, Deputy Director

*Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Victim Services Division*

The National Institute of Corrections (NIC) provides training opportunities via live broadcasts that can be viewed online or on DVD after the program has completed.

On February 18, 2015, the NIC sponsored a three-hour, live broadcast titled "Offender Reentry: The Value of Victim Involvement."

The purpose of the program was to provide information to corrections professionals regarding victims' legal rights during the offender reentry process, to clarify the victims' role in reentry, and to identify challenges and opportunities concerning victims and reentry.

The broadcast also provides some strategies for creating better experiences for both the victim and the offender and to encourage staff to work with victims at all phases of the criminal justice process. This approach can result in better outcomes for the community, victims, and offenders through enhanced offender

accountability, increased victim satisfaction, and community safety.

The program explored the current points in the criminal justice reentry continuum where victims can and should have a voice. The broadcast highlighted best practices for victim involvement in key areas regarding offender intake, incarceration and parole.

Key focus points during intake include victim impact statements, notification enrollment, and no-contact or safety issues. Key focus points in incarceration include offender programming and victim-focused restorative justice practices. Key focus points in probation and parole include working with victim access to information on supervision, conditions of release, restitution and safety, as well as tips on victim centered offender accountability.

You can access archives of this broadcast, at: <http://nicic.gov/broadcasts>. ★

## OFFICE FOR VICTIMS OF CRIME

National Crime Victims' Rights Week

April 19 – 25, 2015

Each April, the Office for Victims of Crime helps lead communities throughout the country in their annual observances of National Crime Victims' Rights Week by promoting victims' rights and honoring crime victims and those who advocate on their behalf. This year the theme is *Engaging Communities. Empowering Victims.*



For more information regarding the National Crime Victims' Rights Week, please visit <http://ovc.ncjrs.gov/ncvrw/>.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Victim Services Division encourages those who are planning events or trainings to submit your event information on the Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Calendar, by visiting <http://tdcj.state.tx.us/php/vscalendar>. The TVAT Calendar allows users to search, view and submit victim-related events and trainings held in Texas.

# THE VICTIM'S ROLE IN THE PAROLE REVIEW PROCESS

by *Brooke Ellison, Manager*

*Texas Department of Criminal Justice - Victim Services Division*

As a Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD) staff member, I have an opportunity to work with crime victims during the parole review process. This can include answering crime victims' questions regarding general parole review procedures to accompanying them to their meeting with the Board of Pardons and Paroles (Board). Working with crime victims is humbling – it allows me to learn from crime victims how important and valuable their role is in the parole review process.

When discussing the crime victims' role in the parole review process, it is important to understand their rights during this phase of the criminal justice system.

## ***Crime Victims' Rights:***

In Texas, crime victims have the right to be informed, be notified, and participate in the parole review process.

## ***To Be Informed:***

Being informed during the parole review process is invaluable to crime victims. The criminal justice system is full of acronyms, terminology and procedures that can seem foreign to those who do not work within the system on a routine basis. In addition, crime victims may be experiencing feelings of injustice (how can he/she already be eligible for release, while I was given a life-long sentence), confusion (I don't understand, I was told he/she would die in prison) and fear (he/she will come find me after he/she is released) as they begin to process that the offender responsible for their victimization may be

released soon. These feelings are often accompanied by sadness, anger, frustration and confusion.

By being informed on the general parole procedures, crime victims can be prepared for what to expect during the process and make informed decisions regarding their involvement.

## ***To Be Notified:***

Crime victims have the right to be notified of parole proceedings concerning the offender responsible for their victimization and the offender's release. These notifications allow crime victims to be informed of the offender's status in the parole review process and to be prepared for what will happen next.

For example, if the victim is registered on the TDCJ VSD Victim Notification System (VNS) with current contact information, they will receive a notice when the offender enters the parole review process. The notification explains the average amount of time an offender will be in the parole review process, how to submit materials for the Board to consider, how to request a meeting with the Board prior to their decision, and contact information for the TDCJ VSD staff. In accordance with Government Code § 508.117, the notice also contains a request for the VNS registrant to inform other persons having an interest in the parole review process that the inmate is being considered for release on parole. The VNS registrants will also receive notices of the Board's decision and an offender's release.

## ***To Participate:***

Crime victims have the choice to participate in the parole review process through the Victim Impact Statement (VIS) form, submission of material for the Board to consider prior to their decision and to meet with the Board either telephonically or in-person.

The VIS form is provided to crime victims by the district or county attorney's office. The VIS form is completed by the crime victim and is designed to collect a crime victim's request for notification and the economic loss, physical injury and psychological harm suffered by the crime victim. The VIS form is considered by the court and the prosecutor prior to the imposition of a sentence by the court in a criminal case. If the offender is sentenced to the TDCJ, the county of conviction is required to include the VIS form in the offender's penitentiary packet. Once received by the TDCJ, the VIS is forwarded to the VSD who then processes the VIS form for inclusion in the offender's parole file. The Board is required to consider the VIS form before an inmate is released on parole.

Crime victims and representatives of crime victims also have the right to provide a separate written statement to the Board. The TDCJ VSD processes submitted materials on behalf of crime victims and concerned citizens for inclusion in the offender's parole file. In addition, crime victims, as defined by Government Code § 508.117, can meet with the Board to present a statement of the person's views about the offense, the offender

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# THE VICTIM'S ROLE

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and the impact of the offense. The TDCJ VSD records requests for a meeting with the Board and provides that information to the Board.

For offenses resulting in the death of a loved one, crime victims often share pictures and information about their loved one whose death was a result of the offense. This allows the Board to know who their loved one was and how their lives have been forever impacted by the loss of their loved one. In addition, for offenses that did not result in a death of a loved one, crime victims can share how they have directly been harmed by the offender's actions. This can include how the crime victim was harmed during the offense, immediately after the offense and years later. For any type of offense, crime victims may share their thoughts, including safety concerns, if the offender is to be released.

Crime victims often express how valuable it is to be heard during this process. By being able to participate and provide information prior to the Board's decision, crime victims have shared feelings of empowerment and satisfaction that they had a role in the process. By sharing information with the Board, crime victims are providing information that is not always available in the offender's parole file. This information, along with the other factors considered by the Board, allows the Board to have a better understanding of the offense and the long-term impact of the offense on the crime victim.

### ***Upon Request/If Requested:***

It is important for crime victims to understand their rights are

dependent upon their request. The Code of Criminal Procedure art. 56.03(b)(7) requires the VIS form to include a statement as to whether or not the victim, guardian, or relative of a deceased victim wishes to be notified in the future of any parole hearing for the defendant and an explanation as to the procedures by which the victim, guardian, or relative may obtain information concerning the release of the defendant.

If an offender is sentenced to the TDCJ, the county of conviction is required to forward the VIS to the TDCJ. Once received, the TDCJ VSD will process the VIS. If the victim requests notification, processing the VIS includes registration on VNS, which enables the victim to receive notification of the offender's parole review.

If the TDCJ has already received the offender, a victim can contact the TDCJ VSD at [victim.svc@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:victim.svc@tdcj.texas.gov), 512-406-5900 or 1-800-848-4284 to request notifications regarding an offender's status, learn more about parole review procedures, submit materials for the Board to consider, and to request to meet with the Board during the offender's parole review.

### ***Relevant Rights:***

Crime victims as defined by Code of Criminal Procedure art. 56.01, have a right "to be informed, upon request, of parole procedures, to participate in the parole process, to be notified, if requested, of parole proceedings concerning a defendant in the victim's case, to provide to the Board of Pardons and Paroles for inclusion in the defendant's file information to be

considered by the board prior to the parole of any defendant convicted of any crime subject to this subchapter, and to be notified, if requested, of the defendant's release" (Code of Criminal Procedure art. 56.02(a)(7)) and "to be informed of the uses of a victim impact statement and the statement's purpose in the criminal justice system, to complete the victim impact statement, and to have the victim impact statement considered: (A) by the attorney representing the state and the judge before sentencing or before a plea bargain agreement is accepted; and (B) by the Board of Pardons and Paroles before an inmate is released on parole." (Code of Criminal Procedure art. 56.02(a)(12).

The Government Code Chapter 508 provides additional relevant statutes. Please click on the link for the exact language of the statute. [http://www.](http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/)

[statutes.legis.state.tx.us/](http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/)

- § 508.117 Victim Notification
- § 508.153 Statements of Victim
- § 508.1531 Contact with Victim
- § 508.190 Avoiding Victim of Stalking Offense
- § 508.191 No Contact with Victim
- § 508.313 Confidential Information

Each edition of *The Victim's Informer* includes an article from the Board to provide criminal justice professionals, victim services professionals and crime victims with current information regarding the parole review process. This edition focuses on frequently asked questions regarding crime victims' meetings with the Board. Please see pages 9-10 for more information. ★

# UNDERSTANDING THE CRIME OF STALKING

by *Rebecca Dreke, Deputy Director, Stalking Resource Center  
National Center for Victims of Crime*

January 2015 marked the 12<sup>th</sup> year recognizing January as National Stalking Awareness Month. Although not a new crime, stalking is certainly a complex crime that is often misunderstood and largely underreported.

A simple definition of stalking is a course of repeated conduct directed against a specific person that puts them in fear. The fear can be of bodily injury, assault, death and even emotional distress.

Stalking is a crime under the laws of all fifty states and the District of Columbia, the U.S. Territories, many Tribal Codes, the federal government, and stalking is also an offense under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Although it is a crime everywhere in this country, the legal statutes vary widely in their definitions, scope, crime classification, and penalty. Unlike other crimes that are defined as an incident, stalking is a pattern of behavior, often of individual acts that could—in isolation—seem benign or be noncriminal.<sup>1</sup>

Research on stalking has shown that it is a widespread problem in our country. Data published by the Centers for Disease Control showed that 7.5 percent of people age 18 or older were stalked in a one-year period. Additionally, at some point in their lives, 15.2 percent of women and 5.7 percent of men have experienced stalking victimization in which they felt fearful or believed that they or someone close to them would be harmed or killed. Both women and

men can be victims of stalking, but women are more often victimized. Individuals age 18 to 24 face the highest rates of stalking. Moreover, stalking has a significant traumatic effect on victims and is linked to intimate partner violence and sexual assault.

The use of technology to stalk, sometimes referred to as “cyberstalking,” is a widespread and significant problem that may include the use of any electronic or digital means to harass, intimidate, threaten, follow, monitor, or make unwanted contact with a victim.

It is rare these days to have a stalking case that doesn’t involve at least one form of technology. While technology has not necessarily created a “new breed” of stalker, the proliferation and advancement of technology has certainly made it easier for perpetrators to stalk their victims. The use of technology facilitates behaviors that stalkers have always engaged in and makes it much easier for offenders to obtain information about the victim, track their whereabouts, monitor them, and harass them.

And offenders do not need to be very tech savvy to misuse these technologies. The technologies they misuse are common to many people including cellphones, cameras, computers, social networking sites, and Global Positioning Systems (GPS). Stalkers and abusers can do a simple internet search for tips on tracking, covert monitoring and surveillance and receive a lot of information and “how to” tips.

Some common ways stalkers misuse technology include:

- Communicating through texts, e-mails, social media sites, and school or work networks.
- Gathering information surreptitiously through hidden cameras and/or recordings.
- Posting false or damaging information about a person online, impersonating them, or making false accusations.
- Spoofing caller identification, whereby the perpetrator calls or texts the victim pretending to be someone else.
- Misusing social media including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. and creating accounts to harass and/or threaten the victim.
- Impersonating the victim by using a false identity or account to place online sex ads or solicit sex.
- Using GPS to track the victim, including placing a GPS device on the victim’s car.
- Setting up recording devices and/or cameras in the victim’s home.
- Installing spyware or apps on the victim’s computer and/or phone.

The threats, risk, and harm that come to a person who is being stalked through technology are just as real and scary as in-person stalking. In some cases, the offender will make a direct threat against his/her victim through one of these media, but often

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<sup>1</sup>To read more about how Texas criminalizes stalking, please see: <http://www.victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center/stalking-laws/criminal-stalking-laws-by-state/texas>.

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the threats and fear-inducing acts are more implicit and only understood in context. Thus, it can be very difficult sometimes for professionals working with victims to identify and recognize this form of stalking. When victims come forward, they themselves may not identify what they are experiencing as stalking or may minimize the behavior because of the medium. They might think “it’s just some texts,” or “it’s just a bunch of annoying posts to my social networking site.” Additionally, victims are often reluctant to report the behavior, especially when the perpetrator is someone they know or someone with whom they have or had a relationship.

So what can service providers do? First, educating yourself is an important step! Know there are myriad ways technology can be misused and abused to stalk and harass someone. Understand that it is relatively easy for many forms of technology to be used against a victim without that person being aware. Learn more about the most common forms of technologies offenders use and the risks they pose. Thinking broadly about technology and how offenders can exploit and misuse it can better help us more effectively respond, assess threats, and safety plan with victims. We encourage victim services and criminal justice professionals to take the online course *The Use of Technology to Stalk* to learn more about a variety of technologies, how stalkers use them, and considerations for victim safety and evidence collection.

Second, when victims take the courageous step to discuss or report what is happening to them, take their reports seriously and do not dismiss what is happening as “a bad breakup” or just part of the “tech culture.” Be aware that online or digital stalking will often coincide with or evolve to direct, in-person stalking behaviors. Many victims of stalking take steps to try to manage, control, and contain what is happening. By the time they

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*Stalking is typically perpetrated by someone known to the victim, most often a current or former intimate partner.*

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do reach out for help, they may very well be at a point of desperation and in need of outside intervention.

Finally, please do not hesitate to contact the Stalking Resource Center (SRC)<sup>2</sup> if you are working with a victim of stalking and need assistance with a technology related issue.

## **When working with victims of stalking:**

- Reassure them that feelings of embarrassment, fear, shame, and concern of not knowing what might happen next are normal.
- Realize that initially victims may minimize what is occurring and possibly downplay the threat posed to them.

- Recognize there are real effects on victim’s emotional, physical, and social well-being.
- Discuss with victims the importance of documenting the stalking behavior and preserving any evidence.<sup>3</sup>
- Connect the victim with additional assistance and resources which can provide assistance with navigating criminal and civil justice systems and can help with safety planning.
- Discuss with the victim the importance of “disengaging” from their stalker. Many victims try to “manage” the stalker and will sometimes respond to the stalker in hopes this will make the behavior stop or deescalate the situation. However, stalkers are often encouraged by any attention, even negative attention.

## **General tech safety strategies to explore with victims:**

- Encourage victims to use a “safer” computer, phone, or tablet if the stalker or abuser has ever had access to theirs. Stalkers will often put spyware or “spy” apps on computers and phones to track someone. Safer computers could be found in libraries, schools, internet cafes, etc. Some domestic violence shelters and programs

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<sup>2</sup>The SRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women to provide technical assistance and training to professionals working to end stalking in their communities. The mission of the Stalking Resource Center is to enhance the ability of professionals, organizations, and systems to effectively respond to stalking. The SRC envisions a future in which the criminal justice system and its many allied community partners will have the best tools to effectively collaborate and respond to stalking, improve victim safety and well-being, and hold offenders accountable. The SRC is the only national resource center dedicated to ending the crime of stalking.

<sup>3</sup>A Stalking Log for documenting stalking can be downloaded at [www.victimsofcrime.org/src](http://www.victimsofcrime.org/src).

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have donated phones available for victims.

- Educate victims about learning their mobile phone settings. Apps that use GPS or Bluetooth can be manipulated by a stalker.
- Keeping passwords private for email and online accounts is important. Consider changing them frequently on safe computers.
- Learn about what public information is available online. Many stores, organizations, clubs, social media sites, etc. share information about all of us. If a victim's address is online and the victim is trying to keep

that information private, this could pose a safety risk.

- Talk with victims about what information and pictures they want shared online through social media sites.

For more information and resources, including an online training on the use of technology to stalk, visit the Stalking Resource Center at [www.victimsofcrime.org/src](http://www.victimsofcrime.org/src).

**Sidebar:** We often hear people use the term “stalking” in a tongue-in-cheek or joking manner, such as “Facebook stalking.” But it is important we don’t devalue the seriousness of this crime by using these terms incorrectly. ★

## Did You Know...

The Texas Government Code § 508.191 requires the Board of Pardons and Paroles to impose a condition of parole or mandatory supervision that a releasee serving a sentence for Stalking shall not communicate directly or indirectly with the victim; go near the residence, place of employment, or business of the victim; or go to or near a school, day-care facility, or similar facility where a dependent child of the victim is in attendance.

For the exact language of the statute, please visit <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us>

## Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse Training Opportunities

### Live Trainings:

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division (VSD) Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse (TxCVC) staff provides training on a variety of topics, which can be tailored to the needs of the requestor. If you would like to host a training in your community, contact the TxCVC at [tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov) or 512-406-5931.

### Webinars:

The TDCJ VSD TxCVC hosts a webinar series. Recent webinars provided information on Victim Services from a Victim's Perspective, Victim Impact Statements (VIS), VIS Activity Reports, Compassion Fatigue Vicarious Trauma, VNS and VINE, and Grief in the Holidays. Webinar descriptions and registration

information, as well as recordings and related documents for past webinars may be accessed on the TDCJ VSD website: [http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/divisions/vs/victim\\_webinars.html](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/divisions/vs/victim_webinars.html)

### TVAT Online:

Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Online is a state-wide online

victim assistance training focused on victim-centered service delivery and professional development that enables new advocates to acquire baseline professional skills and competence. To register or obtain more information, visit: <https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/php/tvatonline/>

## Texas Victim Assistance Training Online

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### CALENDAR

The Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse wishes to remind our readers that a calendar feature has been added for the Texas Victim Assistance Training (TVAT) Online.

Criminal justice and victim services professionals can view, search, and submit victim-related trainings and events on the TVAT Calendar webpage.

[www.tdcj.state.tx.us/php/vscalendar/](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/php/vscalendar/)

# ***THE TEXAS BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES:***

## ***Frequently Asked Questions and Policy Explanations***

*by David Gutierrez, Board Member  
Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles*



The Board of Pardons and Paroles (Board) decides which eligible offenders to release on parole or discretionary mandatory supervision, and under what conditions. Each Board office is assigned to review and make decisions on the cases of offenders in prisons, state jails and other facilities in their area. The Board uses research-based Parole Guidelines to assess each offender's likelihood for a successful parole against the risk to society.

The Board also decides whether to revoke parole if conditions are not met, using a graduated sanctions approach. Depending on the seriousness of the violation, the Board may continue parole, impose additional conditions, place the offender in an Intermediate Sanction Facility, or use other alternatives to revoking parole and sending the offender back to prison. Additionally, the Board recommends clemency matters, including pardons, to the Governor.

In most cases, the parole panel considering an offender for release to parole or mandatory supervision will be composed of the Board member and two parole commissioners located at the office to which the prison facility has been assigned.

The members of the parole panel review each case individually. The member of the parole panel assigned to review the case first is referred to as the Lead Voter.

As a victim, if you wish to speak to the Lead Voter in your case prior to the panel decision, please contact the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) Victim Services Division. The TDCJ Victim Services Division will record your request and forward your name and contact information to the specific Board office at the appropriate time. The Lead Voter would then arrange a time to meet/speak with you.

Some of our most frequently asked questions from crime victims include:

### **Why does the Parole Board even consider parole for some offenders?**

Parole eligibility is determined by statute, based on the sentence and the date of the crime. Parole eligibility dates are calculated based on when an offender is incarcerated. In some cases, the parole eligibility date may change if the offender earns good conduct time.

If parole is denied, most offenders — by statute — receive an annual review. The “next review” is scheduled automatically for the same month in the next year. Those serving a sentence for a violent offense listed in Government Code § 508.149(a) are subject to up to a five-year set off.

### **What are factors the Board will consider during an offender's parole review?**

The Board considers many factors

during an offender's parole review including, but not limited to: the seriousness of the offense(s); the sentence length and how much time the offender has served; offender's age; criminal history (prior probation/parole); number of prison incarcerations; other arrests; institutional adjustment; protest material; and support material.

### **Will the Board have access to my Victim Impact Statement (VIS) during an offender's review?**

The VIS is a form provided to victims by Victim Assistance Coordinators to obtain information about the emotional/psychological, physical and financial impact an offense has had on the victim. The courts are mandated to include the VIS in an offender's penitentiary packet. If the TDCJ Victim Services Division receives a crime victim's VIS, it will be processed and included in the offender's parole review file. Pursuant to Code of Criminal Procedure art. 56.02(a)(13)(B), the Board will consider the VIS before an offender is released on parole.

### **What are the options for my meeting with the Board?**

The meeting can be held in person or telephonically. Victims as defined by Government Code § 508.117 have the discretion of a telephonic or in-office

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## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

OUR GOAL IS TO PRINT NEWS OF INTEREST FOR VICTIMS AND VICTIM ADVOCATES

The Victim's Informer newsletter is published quarterly. Articles, meeting notices, and other submissions should be sent to the TDCJ Victim Services Division, Texas Crime Victim Clearinghouse, 8712 Shoal Creek Blvd, Suite 265, Austin, Texas 78757-6899; faxed to 512-452-0825; or e-mailed to: [tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov). If you would like to submit materials, the deadline dates for articles, meeting notices, and other submissions are identified in the box on this page. For questions or comments, please call us at 800-848-4284 or 512-406-5931.

### Please Note:

You may access the publication at the TDCJ VSD Internet website. If you wish, we will notify you via e-mail each time The Victim's Informer becomes available on the TDCJ VSD Internet website and provide an electronic link to The Victim's Informer. Send your e-mail address to: [tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov](mailto:tdcj.clearinghouse@tdcj.texas.gov)

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## BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES

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interview with the Lead Voter. The Voters will make accommodations to facilitate the meeting.

### Who will I be meeting with?

The Victim will meet with the Lead Voter. On occasion he/she may request an assistant be present.

### How long does the meeting last?

There is no set amount of time for a meeting, generally speaking, they vary depending on the victim's statement and questions/answers from both parties.

### If I am meeting with the Board in-person, where will the meeting be held?

"In-person" meetings are held at the Parole Board Offices, which include: Austin, Amarillo, Angleton, Gatesville, Huntsville, Palestine and San Antonio.

### May my family or friends come with me to the Board meeting?

It will be at the discretion of the Lead Voter.

Government Code § 508.153, allows "the victim, guardian of the victim or close relative of a deceased victim to appear in person before the board members to present a statement of the person's views about the offense, the inmate and the effect of the offense on the victim." The Government Code § 508.153 also states "If more than one person is entitled to appear in person before the board members or parole commissioners (parole panel), only the person chosen by all persons entitled to appear as the persons' sole representative may appear."

### Will the offender, his/her family or friends be present?

No, the offender or his/her family or friends will not be present during the meeting or at the Board Office.

### How long before I will be notified of the Board's decision?

This varies from case to case. If a crime victim is registered on the TDCJ Victim Services Division – Victim Notification System with current contact information, the registrant will receive notification of the Board's decision.

This article is provided by the Board of Pardons and Paroles; Board Member David Gutierrez is the liaison between TDCJ Victim Services Division and the Board. Additional information about factors the Board considers, decision reasons and other topics is available on the Board of Pardons and Parole website: [www.tdcj.state.tx.us/bpp/](http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us/bpp/). ★

The Victim's Informer newsletter is published quarterly. If you would like to submit materials, the deadline dates for articles, meeting notices, and other submissions are:

**March 31, 2015**

Vol. 20, no. 2 (June/July)

**June 30, 2015**

Vol. 20, no. 3 (Sept./Oct.)

**September 29, 2015**

Vol. 20, no. 4 (Dec. 2015/Jan. 2016)