



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt

Männystrie O tha Laa

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The Parole Process

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

**A Guide
for
Victims**

**COMMISSIONER
FOR VICTIMS
OF CRIME**

WHAT IS PAROLE?

Parole is when a prisoner is allowed to leave prison before their sentence end date but must follow strict rules (known as ‘licence conditions’ – being ‘on licence’) while living in the community. They serve the rest of their sentence outside prison but remain under supervision. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) supervises people who are released on licence.

WHAT DOES “ON LICENCE” MEAN?

Being “on licence” means a prisoner has been released from prison but is still legally under sentence. They must follow certain conditions, such as:

- where they must live
- who they can contact
- what activities they can or cannot do

If they break these conditions, they may be returned to prison.

It should be noted that not all sentences include licence conditions. Some people are automatically released when their prison term ends.

WHO DECIDES WHO IS RELEASED ON PAROLE?

Prisoners serving a Life Sentence, an Indeterminate Custodial Sentence (ICS) or an Extended Custodial Sentence (ECS) are eligible for release on parole. Parole decisions are made by the [Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland \(PCNI\)](#). They are independent experts and they take into account information such as:

- The prisoner’s offending history;
- The prisoner’s behaviour in prison;
- Professional risk assessments;
- Reports from prison and probation staff; and
- Any views submitted by registered victims* (*see next section).

They must decide whether the person can be safely managed living in the community.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A VICTIM?

If you **register** with the **Prisoner Release Victim Information Scheme (PRVIS)**, you have the right to:

- Receive information about the prisoner's sentence;
- Provide a written statement to PCNI about your views on the prisoner's release and licence conditions;
- Apply to attend the prisoner's parole hearing to read your written statement; and
- Be told about any decisions regarding release or when pre release testing is being considered.



WHAT IS PRE-RELEASE TESTING (PRT)?

PRT is a structured rehabilitation programme managed by the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) which tests how a prisoner manages their time outside prison before being released on licence¹. It provides important evidence to parole commissioners in helping to decide if a prisoner can safely be released on licence. PRT progresses in three stages and is continually risk assessed.

1. Supervised outings (Accompanied Temporary Release)
2. Unsupervised outings (Unaccompanied Temporary Release)
3. Living or working semi-independently in the community

As a registered victim you will be told in advance when PRT is being considered and you can provide your views to NIPS.

¹ PRT does not apply to DCS sentenced prisoners.

WHAT IS THE PAROLE REVIEW PROCESS?

NIPS refers a prisoner's case to PCNI to commence the parole review process, which has two stages.

STAGE 1 PAPER REVIEW

A Single Commissioner reviews a dossier of documents which includes information about the prisoner's:

- Index offence;
- Offending history;
- Behaviour in prison;
- Professional risk assessments; and
- Registered victim's written views.

If the Single Commissioner does not direct release, the prisoner can request an oral hearing before a Panel of Commissioners.

STAGE 2 ORAL HEARING BEFORE A PANEL

A Panel of either two or three Commissioners holds an oral hearing. The hearing is attended by:

- The prisoner and their legal representative;
- Prison staff; and
- PBNI staff.

In some hearings, a legal representative may also attend on behalf of NIPS.

CAN VICTIMS ATTEND AN ORAL HEARING?

Victims that have registered with PRIVS can apply to attend the oral hearing to read a written statement. Hearings are usually held online. The Chair of the Panel decides if you can attend the hearing. If your application is approved, you read your statement at the start of the hearing and then leave. A Victim Liaison Officer will be available to support you. You may be asked questions by the Panel about the content of your statement.

Should you have any feedback on your experience or wish to make a complaint about any aspect of the hearing you should, in the first instance, raise this with your Victim Liaison Officer.

WHEN WILL I HEAR THE OUTCOME OF THE HEARING?

You will be informed of the Panel's decision within **seven days**.

- If **not released**, the panel will state when the prisoner's case should be reviewed again.
- If **released**, the prisoner will be supervised by a Probation Officer and must follow licence conditions.

WHAT IF THE PERSON BREAKS THEIR LICENCE CONDITIONS?

If probation believes the person cannot be safely managed in the community, they can request a **recall to prison**. This process is fast – usually completed within hours.

Victims will be told if the person is recalled.

If you believe someone is breaking their licence conditions, contact the **Victim Information Unit**. If a new crime is happening, call the police (999 in emergencies).

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE FOR VICTIMS?

You can get support from:

- [Victim Information Scheme](#) (for updates and guidance)
- [Victim Support NI](#) (emotional and practical support)
- The [Victim Charter](#), which explains your rights

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS

Should you have any feedback on your experience or wish to make a complaint about any aspect of the parole process you should, in the first instance, raise this with your Victim Liaison Officer who will escalate to the appropriate area.

SUMMARY OF PAROLE REVIEW PROCESS





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We would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution of victims and their families in co-designing this leaflet with the Commissioner for Victims of Crime Office and the Department of Justice, ensuring it reflects the needs and experiences of those navigating the parole process.